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Conspiracy

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STORY OF THE MOST TERRIBLE BATTLE THAT A MAN CAN HAVE TO FIGHT

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REALIZATION that his yacht, the *Voyageur*, was no longer under way, was the first definite impression to register on Martin Wingate's tortured senses as he awoke that April morning.

From the berth in his wonderfully appointed little cabin, he blinked with drug-dulled eyes of annoyance. The millionaire's tousled hair—already graying, in spite of the fact that Wingate was hardly thirty-eight—his sunken and yellowed cheeks and deep-lined forehead, made him no attractive picture. The sleeves of his pongee pyjamas, pushed back, revealed arms shrunken and nerveless. As, with an effort, he slid out of the berth and stood up, a more repellent-looking individual it would have been hard to fancy.

Dazed by his sudden awakening, puzzled by the hot silence in place of the sea breeze and the pulsing throb of the *Voyageur's* engine that he had expected to

sense, the financier slammed back the latticed blind of his cabin window, and spitefully squinted out into the cutting Southern sunshine.

That sunshine grievously hurt his eyes; for the pupils were dilated to an unnatural degree, by reason of his having had no morphine in nearly eight hours. Not at all understanding where the yacht might be, or why, he perceived, as in a kind of blur, a cove of luminous turquoise waters, cut by the swift, triangular fin of a shark; a curving beach of purest white; dunes sparsely overgrown with coarse grass and topped with ragged palmettos.

Wingate swore dully, and for a minute remained there at the window, trying in vain to grasp the meaning of this unexpected sight.

"What the devil are we tied up *here* for?" he grumbled, in the most poisonous of evil tempers.

Urgently he craved to feel the refreshment of an ocean wind, to hear the swish and murmur of soothing waves along his yacht's hull. This dead and waiting calm disconcerted and angered him. With the petulance of the drug addict—the most splenetic type of humanity—he felt a grievance against the entire universe.

"This is a hell of a place to stop!" he snarled.

He stood there for a suffering moment. Then he whacked the shutter back again, turned, and groped for the little medicine cabinet over his lavabo. Morphine! He must have morphine, at once! Without at least one tablet he felt that he could not live.

Who, seeing him thus, could have recognized in him the jovial, hail-fellow Wingate of university days—the Wingate who had won his college "letter," rowed bow on the 'varsity crew, and finished second in the intercollegiate Marathon of 1906? In all justice, that he had come to his present low estate was no fault of his. It was one of the incalculable aftermaths of the war. A broken thigh when his bombing plane had crashed at Monchy-le-Preux, a long siege of military hospital, where overdriven doctors had given morphine as the easiest and perhaps the only feasible way, and then the sinking in of the talons of the cruelest harpy that has ever tormented mankind—such had been his story. A few worthless "cures" had always been negated by venal orderlies and nurses in sanitariums, always rendered futile by his money power when the "yen" pangs had torn too deep for human endurance. And now—

Now, for all his money, Martin Wingate stood like a fretful, miserable child, pawing in his little medicine cabinet for the phial that alone spelled surcease from misery intolerable—the phial that alone could give him strength to live even a single other day.

He fumbled, groped, and found nothing. He mouthed a curse. The little phial of tablets that meant more than life to him was gone.

For a moment, his mind blurred with confusion and suffering, Wingate stood there on the cabin rug. Barefooted, disheveled, and unlovely, he looked anything but a powerful financier, one of the biggest copper men in the world.

Is not morphine the great democratizer? Before its sovereign power do not plutocrat and slum rat, gently bred woman and slat-

tern of the streets, all bow with equally servile adoration? In the realm of King Morphine there are—at a pinch—no gradations of pride, only degrees of suffering and abasement.

"Where the Hades?" the millionaire growled, his thin hand trembling as it made fruitless search. "I thought it was right here. Thought I left it here last night!"

But no—the all-precious, the indispensable phial still eluded his shaking fingers.

He turned, then, snapped a switch, and flooded the luxurious little cabin with softened electric light. A wondrous cabin, that, oak-paneled, with a writing desk, an easy chair, and silk curtains—a place of luxury strangely dissonant with the suffering of its owner. The light revealed only too clearly that the phial no longer stood where he believed he had put it when, last night, he had taken his last tablet.

Not in the least understanding where it might have gone, Wingate blinked vacantly. He bent his gaze on the floor, saw nothing there, and stood gaping, incredulous. He fingered his unshaven chin—for latterly he had lapsed into somewhat careless ways—and tried to think.

In his mind there rose a nebulous fear lest he might have fallen victim to some sort of terrifying sleepwalking—lest, driven by subconscious memories of old-time battles against the drug, he might have got up in the night and pitched the phial overboard through the cabin window.

"Lord, if I've done that!" he quavered hoarsely, well knowing what hours of incredible torment might be facing him before the yacht could put back to Queensport, where he could bribe some crooked doctor to give him another lot.

Then, as he stood shaking and horrified, all at once a beatific thought surged across his tormented brain—the thought of his extra supply! His reserve, the emergency ration he always carried, in case of trouble!

Since to those unfortunate victims of circumstance whom the thoughtless call "dope fiends" the one supreme business of life is the maintenance of their supply of the precious drug, Wingate, like many another, always kept a secret reserve, never to be touched save in cases of extreme urgency. Now this urgency lay heavy upon him.

He fumbled some keys from the pocket of his white flannel trousers, which hung on a hook. Then he knelt tremulously and opened one of the two lockers under his

berth. His questing hand plunged in, and, at the place where it should have encountered a small tin box—it met vacancy.

Uttering a groan that was half a curse, the millionaire crouched stricken and ir-resolute, miserable as any slumster deprived of his "shot."

He had awakened late, and had already gone more than two hours past his accustomed time for the morning tablet. No chronometer keeps more accurate time than does the nervous system of an addict, when awake. At certain specified intervals the drug must be taken, or misery results. Wingate was suffering that misery now, and every moment it was growing more acute.

"Damnation!" he chattered, his every nerve racked and twisted with pain. "It's here! It *must* be here, somewhere!"

Feverishly he began to hunt, pawing out a raffle of inconsequent things and throwing them pell-mell. Among them was a silver frame, containing the photograph of Constance, his wife, and of Hugh, his son. Once—in their absence—he would have kept that photograph on the desk in his cabin. Once it would have been his most precious treasure; but now he had tossed it into the locker as a thing indifferent, almost hateful—as a reproach that shamed and humbled him.

The silver frame stuck among some other things in the locker. He gave it an ugly wrench that bent it, and flung it with an oath to the floor. Broken glass littered the rug.

In panic haste Wingate emptied the first locker, and then the other. His cabin floor grew chaotic with a mass of impedimenta. He dug among these things, ripping papers, tearing cardboard boxes, throwing stuff about like the very madman he was becoming. An enormous and intolerable panic drove him with scorpion lashes. This, this was fear!

Wingate had never really feared the "cures." He had always known that when the agony of abstinence should become too dreadful, he could surreptitiously buy morphine. In earlier days he had not feared flying over the German lines. Peril of war had been to him a wondrous kind of sport. He had never feared business rivals. To strive with them and beat them had been his play. Life, the world, death had never inspired any terrors. All these years past, his every fear had centered in the possi-

bility that at some time, through some unforeseen event, he might be cut away from his god, morphia.

And now that hour was at hand.

Like a creature possessed, he searched his cabin. Again and again, to wearisome iteration, he fumbled over the same fruitless packages. He cut his hand on a jagged splinter of broken glass, but gave no heed to that. Slow, sullen blood stained everything he touched. No matter!

He emptied every drawer in his desk, turned all his pockets inside out, and crawled and fumbled in obscure corners, cursing, mouthing. He was a pitiable, unmanly figure, such as only a drug slave can be—a figure such as to make one shudder away, ashamed of humanity and of all its vaunted strength.

At last, convinced against his will that every grain of his vitally essential drug was really gone—though how this amazing thing could have happened escaped all comprehension of his pain-fogged mind—he abandoned the useless and degrading search. He crouched in his desk chair, shaking, beaten, done, wrenched with torment and terror.

Then, of a sudden, he forced himself to a desperate calm. He began jamming the litter into the lockers under the berth, hit or miss. When he laid hands on the picture of Constance and Hugh, he crammed it back along with everything else, unheeding the silent appeal of the eyes that looked at him from the bent and ravaged frame.

At last, all the things stowed away, he crowded the lockers shut, locked them, and gave some semblance of order to the cabin. Unsteadily he groped for the push button.

"Back to Queensport, as fast as the engines will drive her!" he muttered. "But God knows where we are, or what's happened, or how long it 'll take to get back!"

Shuddering, twitching, he slumped into his easy-chair by the desk, and beat the knuckles of one fist into the other palm.

"God knows, God knows! I'm in for hell, all right—perhaps for death!"

II

A KNOCKING at the door told that Wingate's summons had been heard. Unsteadily he leaned over and shot back the bolt. The door opened.

"You rang, sir?" asked Zanelli, the steward.

"Of course I rang!" snapped the mil-

lionaire, with raw nerves. "Who do you suppose rang? What an idiotic question! Where the devil are we, anyhow?"

Zanelli—tall, dark, saturnine—shrugged his slender shoulders. A rather handsome figure he made there, in his white duck uniform. Olive-skinned, a fine type of Italian blood, he formed a strong contrast to his master.

"Where, sir? I don't know." He spoke quietly, with due deference. "Stopping at some island or other, off the coast. The captain hasn't told me just where."

"You're a fool, Zanelli!"

"Yes, sir."

"What the blue Tophet are we doing here?"

"I heard something about engine trouble, sir."

"Engine trouble, eh?" A moment's pause, while Wingate held himself in leash. The steward's dark eyes searched him. "See here, Zanelli!"

"Well, sir?"

"Have you been rummaging around here in my cabin? No lies, now! The truth!"

"Rummaging, sir?" Zanelli flushed darkly. "Certainly not, sir! I make up the berth and keep the cabin in order—that is all."

Wingate forced himself to eye the man narrowly. The steward's look was steadier than his master's, and it was Wingate's that fell.

"Send Captain Jaccard here at once!" he flung out.

"Yes, sir."

Zanelli withdrew, carefully closing the door.

After some five minutes' waiting, which in that humid stifle of heat seemed an hour, the quivering and pain-racked financier heard Captain Jaccard's heavy step in the outer cabin, and another knock—a more firm-fisted one—on the door.

"Come!" he cried, and the captain entered. "Now, then, what the devil is the meaning of all this?"

"We've broken our crank shaft, sir," Jaccard made answer. A tall, broad-chested fellow he, rising thirty-five, blue-eyed and phlegmatic. "I was driving her a little too hard, sir. Wanted to make Beaufort this morning, to pick up the first mate there. It's hard to be short-handed."

"Crank shaft, eh? Damnation! I never heard anything break!"

"Well, it's broken, anyhow," the captain calmly asserted. He seemed a shrewd, competent fellow. Wingate had hired him for this cruise on the best of references. "It happened about three bells of the morning watch, at sea."

"And where are we lying now?" gritted Wingate.

"Tortugas Key, sir—uninhabited little island, about thirty miles off the coast. Lucky for us the weather was calm. I put down the tender, and it towed us here. We're anchored. I can make repairs—strap up the break, you know, sir. There's no other damage; though if we hadn't had that new Voorees governor—"

"Hang the details—and you, too, for driving her too hard! How far are we from Queensport?"

"Chart shows about seventy-five miles, sir."

"That's good!" Wingate's pain-contracted face lighted for a moment. This anguish, at all events, could soon be ended—ended before utter collapse set in. The ghost of a smile wrinkled his dry, parchment-like skin. "Seventy-five miles, eh? The tender can make that in four hours."

"Five, at the outside. A big speed boat like that—"

"Yes, yes, I know. Fill her up with gas, Jaccard! I've got to get back to Queensport at once. Just remembered some business with my bank there that I've got to attend to right away."

"Our wireless is working first-rate, sir. Can't you do this business by wireless?"

"Damn it, no! Don't argue!" Decisively the financier shook his head; but his lean fingers, drumming on the desk, gave the lie to his feeble show of energy. "Get everything ready for a quick run back to town. I'm leaving at once."

"After breakfast, of course, sir?" asked the captain, as if to temporize.

"Curse breakfast!" almost shouted Wingate. "What d'you mean, opposing me? Get things ready, I tell you! What the devil am I paying you for?" Wingate's raw nerves lashed savagely at Jaccard. "Go on now—do as you're told!"

"I'm sorry, sir," answered the captain imperturbably, "but I can't, because—"

"You *what*? You can't? But you *must*!"

"How can I, sir, when the tender isn't here?"

"Not—*here*?" Wingate sank back in

his chair, with eyes fishlike in blank dismay. "What d'you mean, not here?"

"It's gone, sir," Jaccard explained. "I sent it back to Queensport for materials to mend the break—steel straps, bolts, and—"

Wingate's groan interrupted the skipper's explanation. An expression of intolerable anguish contorted the millionaire's face. Though he sought to control himself, an anguished twitch shuddered through his emaciated body.

"Well, by thunder!" exclaimed the captain. "Is it as important as all that?"

"Important? Good God, man, it may be a matter of life or death to—to my bank. There must be some—some way to get back to Queensport—*must* be! Can't you patch up the infernal crank shaft, or something?"

"Not without the proper materials, sir. We're as helpless as a cripple in a stevedores' fight."

"No way to rig canvas?"

"No, sir. No wind, anyhow—dead calm."

Wingate's fists clenched, twitching. He smote the desk a savage blow.

"You're a hell of a captain, I must say, getting me into a jam like this!" he snarled.

"Accidents will happen, sir," Jaccard affirmed. Then, after a long pause in the stifling heat of the electric-lighted cabin: "Beg pardon, sir, but you don't look quite yourself this morning. Anything wrong, sir?"

"Curse it, no! No, I tell you—*no*! I'm just worried about that bank business—that's all. I'm all right—quite all right!" Wingate shot an oblique, evil glance at the captain. "What the devil should be the matter with me?"

"Oh, nothing, sir. I was just thinking you looked a bit off color—that's all."

"Well, you thought wrong! And keep your infernal thoughts to yourself, till you're asked! I'm not paying you to volunteer your alleged thoughts! If you'd thought more about that shaft, it would have been a damned sight better!"

Wingate, savage and frightened and ugly, suffering and spent, reached for his cigarette case, snapped it open, and with a shaking hand lighted a cigarette. A pitiable figure he made, thin, wasted, as he sat wrapped in the bath robe that he had put on after Zanelli's departure. Gaunt and unshaven, he looked anything but a power in the world of finance.

Captain Jaccard, observing his employer, wrinkled his blond brows and smiled a bit oddly. Wingate inhaled a lungful of smoke, blew thin vapor, and twitchingly drummed on the desk top.

"If there's anything I can do for you, sir?" tentatively volunteered the captain. "Anything, say, in the way of medicine? Of course, I'm no doctor, you understand; but I have a little medical kit in my cabin, and—"

"Medical kit, eh?" ejaculated the magnate, straightening up as if with a galvanic shock. The unnaturally dilated pupils of his eyes held an almost feline quality. A poisoned soul in an envenomed body seemed peering through them. "What have you got in the way of—medicines?"

"Oh, just a small general line of essentials, sir. What might you be needing?"

"It's this damned tooth!" groaned Wingate, pressing a hand to his jaw. "Hardly slept a wink all night!"

"That's odd," smiled Jaccard. "Just a minute ago you said you didn't hear the shaft break, or the—"

"Never mind what I said, curse you!" flared the sufferer. "Don't you stand there catechizing me! Got anything good for toothache, have you?"

"Well, sir, I don't rightly know," the captain made answer. He was a calm figure of strength in his white uniform. "I haven't got much, but I might quiet you down a bit till you can get to a dentist."

"That's the idea—to quiet the pain down temporarily!" Wingate grasped at the suggestion as a drowning man clutches at the proverbial straw. "But I *must* get back to Queensport—that bank business, and the tooth, and all. Must get this infernal molar out. Damn it, man, I'm suffering agonies!" He groaned with complete realism. His nerves, stretched to the ultimate breaking point, quivered as if to snap. "Come on, now—what have you got in your kit?"

"Well, sir, there's iodine, and arnica, and morphine, and—"

"*Morphine!*" The word escaped in an involuntary gasp. "You—you've got—"

"Why, yes, sir—I always carry a little. Perhaps a tablet or so, even an eighth of a grain, might help some."

"Go get it!"

"Though of course, sir, you might perhaps prefer—"

"Damn you, go get the morphine! Why

are you standing there, staring at me? Who's paying you, anyhow? When I order, obey! Go!"

Jaccard surveyed him appraisingly. Then he nodded and withdrew, carefully closing the door.

Alone, the millionaire clasped his hands, wringing them till the bony fingers went bloodless.

"Morphine!" he gasped, in a choking whisper. "Oh, my God, *morphine!*"

III

It seemed an eternity to the agonized Wingate before once more Jaccard's knock sounded at the door.

"Come in!" he gnarled, in a kind of broken gasp. Then, with a terrible intensity of eagerness that his broken will power, his shattered pride, failed to mask: "Got it, have you?"

The captain nodded.

"Where is it?"

Jaccard touched his pocket with a tanned, muscular hand.

"Well, what the devil are you standing there for, and not giving it to me?"

"Beg pardon, sir"—the captain smiled oddly—"but—well—"

"Well, what?"

"I hate to say it, sir, but—"

"Say what, curse you?"

"I've got to ask you to pay me for it."

"Pay you?" Wingate's lantern jaw dropped. His eyes went blank with amazement. "Pay you?"

"Well, why not, sir? After all, the morphine's mine, isn't it?"

"Why, you—you infernal scoundrel! You crook!" choked the millionaire. "On my own yacht! Pay you! I should say not!"

"Very well, sir—as you wish."

Jaccard, half turning, laid his heavy hand on the door knob. Instantly Wingate sprang up, almost clawing for him.

"Here, man! Wait! What are you doing?"

"You understand me, I guess."

"But, man," pleaded Wingate, "even a criminal, a condemned murderer in the death cell, gets his tobacco. They don't sell it to him! If he has a toothache, they give him something to stop it!"

"You object to buying morphine, sir?"

"I do!" Something of manhood reasserted itself in Wingate. "It isn't the price. A few cents—pshaw! It's the prin-

ciple. I can't debase myself to dicker with you like that, on my own yacht. I might as well charge you for your food. Men don't do things like that—not on ship-board, anyhow!"

"Well, I do!" Jaccard asserted doggedly. "I happen to be in need of a little ready money, above my wages; and I've got a valuable commodity—for sale. Well, how about it?"

Jaccard's manner had changed—had grown coarser, more overbearing. Even yet Wingate seemed unable to comprehend the net tightening about him. He stood there, a strange and wasted figure in the mocking gay bath robe, trembling, unnerved, amazed.

"Of course," half sneered the captain, "if your pride means more to you than relief from your—toothache—"

"You mean to tell me that you, my employee—"

Jaccard nodded. His face, till now bland and smiling, had assumed a rather sinister expression.

"I've got a few things to attend to, sir," said he. "I told the engineers I'd only be gone a few minutes. If you don't want to buy—well, there's nothing more to be said about it."

Jaccard half opened the door.

"Hold on! Wait!" gasped the wretched Wingate. "I—I'll buy; but, damn you, when we get to any port at all, I'll fire you, if it's the last thing God ever lets me do!"

"All right, sir! I was thinking of leaving you, anyhow. I don't care much for these nickel-plated, make-believe jobs. There's no kick to them. Besides, when we get back to port, I guess I'll be fixed so I won't be worrying much about anything. Now, sir, how many grains of morphine do you want?"

"Give me the whole damned bottle! Here!"

Wingate jerked open his desk drawer, ruffled the contents, found and hauled out a japanned metal box, and unlocked it with shaking fingers. He extracted a thick sheaf of currency, slipped off a ten-dollar bill, and dropped it on the desk.

"There you are!" he choked. "Now give me—"

"Sorry, sir," negatived Jaccard, shaking a very decisive head; "but that chicken feed wouldn't buy the dust off a single tablet."

"What?"

"I can't let such valuable stuff go at any such figure as that."

"But, man, in the open market, morphine only costs—"

"Yes, but this isn't the open market, you see, sir," the captain interrupted, raising his hand. "Not at all! Quite the contrary!"

"You—you mean you're going to hold me up?"

"I mean you've got to meet the price in this particular market, which is the only market open to you."

"Why, you infernal scoundrel! You—"

"Look here, now! I don't care much for your line of talk. You'd better pipe down, or the market *may* close altogether!"

Wingate choked over incoherent words.

"This is highway robbery!" he finally managed to articulate.

"Hardly that," smiled the captain. "Not at sea!"

"It's piracy, then! It's blackmail, grand larceny, extortion! It's conspiracy! And when I get you ashore—"

"All right! But a good many mighty interesting things are liable to happen before you do."

"It—it's robbery at sea! That's piracy, and—"

"Oh, forget that! It's nothing but a case of supply and demand. I'm supply, and you're demand, and that regulates the price, doesn't it? Well, what say?"

The millionaire stared with horrified realization. For a moment he stood there, racked and shaking, tortured with the gnawing, intolerable agony of abstinence from his indispensable drug. Then, all at once, he laughed gratingly, horribly.

"I see!" he gulped. "It's all plain enough now! You got in here, into my cabin, some time when I was on deck. You stole all my morphine." He swept a quivering hand at desk and lockers. "You and—I don't know who else, but I dare say it's Zanelli—you've got me trapped here!" His lip drew back in a vicious, canine snarl. "It's all a plot, a hellish conspiracy! I don't believe there's a damned thing the matter with the engine! You've simply got me caught, here, wherever this cursed island is, and now—"

"Now I'm selling morphine, sir, and you're buying it," the captain smilingly interrupted. "You've got to have it—just got to! Good stuff, too, at times!" He drew a phial from his pocket, held it in his

strong fingers, and critically surveyed it. "Great stuff! Worth any money, in a case like yours!"

At sight of the drug, Wingate's disjointed, half incoherent tirade wilted and died. His staring eyes fixed on the phial with pitiable craving. No martyr on the rack longs for release so passionately as an addict for his morphine. Wingate's claw-like hands trembled toward the phial.

"I'll pay!" he gasped. "This infernal toothache—anything—can't stand it! What price?"

"There, that's better!" said Jaccard. "I kind of thought you'd meet my terms. A man with a recurrent—toothache like yours, will give anything to get rid of it. Won't he, now?"

"For God's sake, man, stop talking!" The millionaire's voice rose to a reedy falsetto of agony. "Stop talking, and give it to me!"

All manhood lost, all self-respect gone by the board, he cringed, suppliant.

"Yes, yes—all right! But not till we come to terms, and I'm paid. Cash in hand, too!"

"Cash, yes! What price?"

"One thousand dollars!"

"No, no, no! A thousand, just for that little phial! No, no—it's impossible!"

"Who said anything about the phial? Per tablet, I mean."

"One thousand dollars per tablet?"

"That's the figure—and it's a rising market, too!"

For a moment Wingate stared at Jaccard with dumb-smitten amazement. The incredible proposition could not immediately strike home; but as its full significance won to his dazed brain, he made a brutish, gulping noise, and flung himself at the captain.

Impotently the millionaire's weak fists battered that solid bulk. They did no more than dash the phial from Jaccard's hand. It fell to the cabin floor, rolled against one of the lockers, and stopped there. With an insensate, wild rage, Wingate tried to land some telling blow. Tortured nerves and outraged mind drove him on to make of himself a degrading, pitiful spectacle—how different from what he had been in those other, far-away days of splendid athletic achievement!

Jaccard hardly did him the honor of caring to ward off his blows. The sturdy sailor took them with indifference, as if Wingate had been a petulant child. Then, with an

easy backward swing of the arm, he flung off his assailant.

"There, now!" he exclaimed. "That's enough mutiny! Assaulting a ship's captain on the high seas! I could make it warm for you, if I wanted to; but I won't. What's the use? You're not right in the head, as any court would soon find out."

At the bitter gibe, he laughed unpleasantly; then he picked up the phial and smoothed down his trim white jacket, which the futile attack had slightly ruffled. An immaculate person, this Jaccard seemed.

With eyes of murderous hate, Wingate glowered at his tormentor from the berth where he had been thrown, and where he now half crouched.

"I see you don't want to buy any to-day," continued the captain. "Guess you aren't in the market, are you?" He pocketed the phial and turned toward the door. With his hand on the knob, he added: "Well, any time you happen to want any, just remember that I've got all the available supply; and don't forget that to-morrow the price advances to fifteen hundred per tablet. That's all. Good day!"

The door swung and clicked. Jaccard was gone.

On the instant, Wingate leaped up, clutching at the door, pleading, babbling:

"Here! Wait—hold on! Come back!"

No answer. Wingate snatched open the door and peered into the main cabin. It was empty.

Disheveled, undone, beaten, and torture-racked in every nerve and muscle, the millionaire stood for a moment, peering with bloodshot eyes. A thin slaver was lagging from the corner of his mouth. His chest heaved like a spent racer's.

"Captain Jaccard! Oh, captain! Steward! Zanelli! Anybody!" he shouted in a choking voice.

Still no reply.

A silence as of the tomb, doubly impressive in that sweltering breathlessness of heat, hung like the leaden weight of destiny.

With a gulp, a gasp of mortal agony, Wingate staggered back into his cabin. He slammed the door, collapsed in his desk chair, and remained there motionless, his head lying limp across the desk on his thin and nerveless arms.

IV

It was only some half hour later, when Wingate had a little recovered and had re-

peatedly pushed the call button, that Zanelli appeared. To this extent, at least, the owner still retained a little control aboard his own yacht. He did not yet have to abase himself by going in search of the captain; but, had the steward not come just about when he did, Wingate would have found himself constrained to even this humiliation. Mighty is the driving power of King Morphine, as all his subjects know!

"You rang, sir?" Zanelli mocked.

"Yes." No longer did the millionaire rage, storm, abuse, threaten. Meekly suppliant was his tone. "Send Captain Jaccard here."

"The captain's busy, sir."

With calculating eyes Zanelli observed his titular master, the most miserable of humans.

"It's very important," Wingate forced himself to articulate with pale lips. He felt himself on the ragged edge of collapsing again—this time perhaps for good. Every fiber and every nerve were shrieking for morphine. How much longer could will power drive them on? "Very important," he repeated. "I must see him—at once!"

"The captain's given orders, sir, he mustn't be disturbed."

For an instant, then, the millionaire's temper flared.

"Who the devil can give orders here but me?" he mouthed.

"The captain, sir. Beg pardon, but when a vessel's at sea, the captain's word is law."

Wingate shuddered. His lips went crooked.

"Tell him to come as soon as he's disengaged," he forced himself to articulate thickly. "That's all. You can go."

Alone once more, he forced himself to a certain specious calm. He realized that the situation was desperate in the extreme, and might very possibly end in his death. Only one way of surviving seemed at all likely. He must submit to any exaction—for the time being, at least, until some turn of fate might redeal the cards.

He got enough control of his nerves to count the money in his dispatch box.

"Only about eight thousand here!" he groaned. "That's hardly enough to supply me for to-day—not quite enough, for I've been taking at least ten grains daily. And to-morrow—what the devil am I going to do to-morrow?"

An agony as of death's very self confronted him. Though morphine addicts rarely sweat, Wingate was sweating now, what with his suffering and with the stifling heat of the cabin.

"God, what a trap I'm in! What am I going to do?" Like one bereft of reason he beat weak fists on the desk. "What am I going to do?"

A sudden wild idea flashed to his brain. It nerved him to another search of his cabin. His revolver—where was it? Had he seen it when rummaging for morphine? He could not tell. Everything seemed all a blur.

He had had a gun. Yes, he remembered that, well enough. Where was it now? If he could find it—well, what did he count on doing? He hardly knew. Only a kind of tortured instinct drove him to hunt for the weapon.

All at once he caught a glimpse of blue metal, snatched the gun from a rack of disorder, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Now, then!" he gulped, but trembled at his own thought. He had never fired that revolver. Since the war he had not fired any weapon, much less at a man. Whether he had nerve enough, now, to kill—if it came to that—how could he know? Yet somehow the possession of the gun a little steadied him, brought back a little power of thought.

He sat there, trying to formulate some plan. Trapped, outplayed, poisoned with drug addiction and bafflement and hate, he brooded. For all his wealth, he knew himself one of the poorest of men. Dimly he realized the truth that morphine had made of him, as it does of all its victims, a creature incapable of courage, truth, or manhood, robbed of will power, a mere husk and shell of his true self. Half his hate was for the thing he had become. Black pits of despair engulfed him.

"This gang's in earnest, right enough!" he thought. "They're diabolically clever. They've attacked me, not with blackmail, which a man can fight and sometimes conquer; not with force, which can be met with force; but with their ability to torture me beyond all endurance. Could anything be more devilish?"

That he himself was his own worst enemy he understood with perfect clarity. He was bound to the rack of his own inescapable necessities; and these men—his executioners—need do nothing, save to keep the

drug away from him, to cause him the most excruciating and intolerable torment.

Nor, in case he should survive this ordeal, could he ever take vengeance. That would mean confessing his vice to the whole world. The tormentors could deny their plot, could say that the engine had broken down, could allege that Wingate had gone mad, or had been stricken with a fever.

The hellish cleverness of the trap vaguely dawned on the victim. Through all his pain and hate, somewhere from deep recesses of his mind uprose a sort of saturnine admiration for such well planned and perfectly executed strategy. More than once he himself had trapped and beaten a competitor, had been merciless and hard; but never once had any snare of his approached this for sheer, infernal cleverness.

"It's efficiency, all right!" he groaned, quivering at his desk. He hated himself doubly for being inefficient and unable to strike back. "They've got me in a jam, sure enough—but have they?"

Just for one instant the ghost of a fighting gleam brightened his feverish eye; but the gleam faded, submerged in dolorous weakness. He remained there, lagging, drooping, wrenched with the pangs of an unspeakable agony.

Half an hour later, having well disciplined his victim by a long wait, Captain Jaccard put in an appearance. He found the millionaire dressed and shaven, though with an oozing cut on the cheek where the nerve-racked fingers had let the razor slip.

Wingate seemed a bit calmer now, despite the fact that his martyrdom had really increased till every tortured neuron clamored for surcease from misery. Morphine has this truly devilish property, that it crystallizes in the nerve centers, and, when the supply stops, it begins to dissolve there. It is this dissolving that makes its victims writhe—that sometimes, if no more drug is given, actually kills them.

"Well, sir, how about it?" asked the captain.

"It's all right. I'll meet your terms."

"That's good! I rather thought you would. But this is to be a cash business—strictly cash, or its equivalent in negotiable securities easy to turn into cash without question."

"All right. I agree. Give me two tablets. Here's your two thousand."

Wingate counted out the sum with shaking fingers, and laid it on the desk. Jac-

card also counted the money, folded it with deliberation, and tucked it into his pocket. Then he uncorked the phial, shook out two of the precious tablets, and laid them down.

The owner gestured at the door. Without a word, the captain withdrew.

Another hour, and a calmed, nerve-strengthened Wingate sat at the table in the main cabin, under the open skylight, which admitted such air as stirred. An awning over the skylight dimmed the sun's glare. Tobacco smoke and the aroma of coffee filled the cabin.

Wingate was smoking his pipe, and seemed almost himself again. Even that, of course, meant a sufficiently pitiful figure for a man who had once been a first-rate athlete; but by comparison with the hours just gone, the improvement was enormous. In no affliction is relief so immediate as when morphine is given to an addict who has been deprived. Tortured nerves and flayed tissues almost at once respond, and relax to temporary comfort. A victim on the very point of death from abstinence will recover in an amazingly short time.

Wingate had been able to take a glass of orange juice, a slice or two of toast, and a cup of coffee. He looked not much different from his usual emaciated and fallow self, as he sat there in white flannels, master of his own nerves again—for a while!

"I think," he was saying judicially to the captain, who sat across the table from him, "I think you and I had better reach some agreement at once."

"Agreement?"

"Yes—an agreement. I suppose nobody is listening in?"

"Both engineers are below, the steward's ashore, and the three common hands are getting pretty close to Queensport by now."

"Very well!" There was a long pause.

"You're playing a risky game, Jaccard!"

"Perhaps, but the stakes are high enough to make it worth while."

"Does it occur to you," went on the millionaire, thinking of the gun in his pocket, "that you might possibly get killed, one way or another?"

"If I did, that would be most unfortunate for you," replied the captain. "You see, I've got all the morphine hidden away where the devil himself couldn't find it. Not even Zanelli knows where it is. With me dead, you'd probably pass out in three or four days—after an exceedingly unpleasant experience."

Wingate grimaced.

"You ought to have been a financier, instead of a crook!" he snarled.

"Thanks; but you might as well drop the personal remarks. I don't care about them. When you came on deck and asked me to come below, I thought you had some kind of a proposition to make."

"Well, I have. Why can't we come to terms now as well as later? Name your figure."

"Figure? For what?"

"For giving back my—medicine, and ending this cruise. Take me back to Queensport, and you shall have your discharge—you and Zanelli, both of you—with first-class recommendations."

"Nothing doing! I'm not running my neck into any noose, thank you!"

"No noose at all. I won't make any row. I'll give you a good character. How about it? Say a hundred thousand, eh?"

"No, sir! In the first place, a hundred thousand isn't a drop in the ocean compared to what I'm going to clean up this time. As for the good character, I wouldn't trust a doper on his Bible oath!"

"You're using some pretty rough language, Jaccard!"

"Well, this is a rough time we're in for. We might just as well drop all the fine phrases, and all the nonsense about toothache and so on. I know all about you, Wingate! I've known all about you for a couple of years. If I hadn't, how could I have planned this little party?" Jaccard laughed grimly, his fist heavy on the table.

"There's nothing doing on any proposition to buy me off with a little cash and a dope fiend's promise!"

Wingate flushed dully and made an ugly grimace.

"How about two hundred thousand, and go scot-free?"

"No!"

"I've got a long arm. If you put this through, look out!"

"Your arm will be a bit shorter before you and I kiss each other good-by," mocked the captain. "It's no use trying to buy me off. I'm like the architect who said he had other plans."

"But, damn it, can't you listen to reason? I'll raise the ante another hundred thousand. There, now!"

Jaccard shook a decisive head.

"If that's your only line of talk, I've got something more important to attend to."

No, sir—I'm not going to do business with you on any such basis. Do you suppose I would go ashore with you and trust you to keep mum? Why, you'd have me on the hot coals in less than no time. *I'm* no such fool! Think I want to spend five or ten years playing checkers with my nose on the crossbars of a jail window? Forget it!"

"Incorruptibly corrupt, eh?" flung Wingate. "I see! I've known a good many men like that, in various walks of life; but there's one little detail you haven't fully considered." He blew smoke, leaned back in his chair, and seemed at ease. A sense of physical comfort suffused his relaxed nerves and gave him a sort of specious calm. "If this hold-up goes on for a week or two, and we don't arrive at Key West, the *Voyageur* will be missed. Search will be made, and—"

"Never mind about that!" interrupted Jaccard. "I've attended to all that. You forget that I was the one who had to go to the customhouse and make out the clearance papers. There wasn't a word about Key West in those papers. I just put down: 'Indefinite destination—coastwise fishing trip,' and it went, all right. So there you are!"

Wingate pondered this rather arresting statement for a moment. Then, indignantly—or, at least, with attempted indignation—he exclaimed:

"Well, you *are* a thoroughgoing scoundrel, eh?" Somehow he had to admit a certain perverse appreciation of the man's foresight and completeness. How tolerant his drug-fed nerves had now become! "I couldn't have planned it better myself. Still, there's another fact to consider."

"And what's that?"

Wingate tapped his pipe ashes into a bronze tray on the table before replying.

"It's just this," he said. "I've only got about six thousand in cash left. That's not going to last any time at all, at present market rates."

"You're right, it isn't! That's why you're going to shoot a wireless to your bank in Queensport, this morning, that you're sending me for more."

"What?"

"Sending me for more—a lot more," repeated the captain, unperturbed. "You can give me a written order, too. They know me. I've cashed a few of my pay checks there. It'll all be easy sailing. If they haven't the cash on hand, they can

get plenty by wire from your headquarters in New York. Negotiable securities—such as I approve—will do. Pretty good plan, isn't it?"

"You damned robber!" Wingate gasped.

"Never mind about that. Let's get busy. I want to get under way."

"Under way? But the tender—that's gone!"

Jaccard laughed easily.

"Just a little fiction of mine," he explained, "like the shaft being broken. I handed you that story to get the game started in some kind of way that wouldn't give you apoplexy. You're too valuable a man to take chances with, you see. When you get the note written to the bank, I'll connect with the tender, all right enough."

Wingate stared with growing rage. The veins on his thin temples began to knot, to protrude. A gleam as of madness inflamed his eyes, which once more were narrowed by the contracting power of the drug.

Then, of a sudden, as if some final cord of control had snapped, he plunged a hand into his pocket, snatched out the gun, and at point-blank range leveled it at Jaccard. He pulled trigger. Only a metallic snap followed.

Cursing, he tried to fire again, and yet again. Nothing happened. Vastly amused, the captain laughed in his face.

"Of course I knew you had that," Jaccard told him. "I'm not such a fool as to overlook a gun. I took out all the cartridges. I just wanted to see how much of a murderer you really are at heart."

Wingate dashed the revolver to the floor with lurid oaths.

"There, now, that'll do!" the captain commanded, curtly. "No more stage plays! Time's passing. You've got to get to work on that wireless to the bank!"

The millionaire, dazed though he was, clutched at this final hope. A code message—that might save him yet!

As with a kind of uncanny prescience, the captain smiled.

"And there'll be no funny business, either," he added. "We'll use the A. B. C. code. I know all about that."

Wingate groaned.

"Hamstrung!" he bitterly exclaimed. "Beaten at every point, by a common sailor!"

"As you like," assented the captain. "Common enough in some ways, but uncommonly determined. I hold the tiller,

and I'll steer the course for you. Your little act will be just to go along, nice and quiet."

"You'll pay for this! You'll pay!"

"Never mind! I guess, when it comes to paying, you'll do most of that. You'd better hurry up, too, because you've only got a few tablets left, and you'll get no more till you plank down the cash. No checkee, no washee! If you don't get hold of some more money right away, by tomorrow you'll be clawing at the sides of the pit again, and groveling in the red-hot coals. You'll be in hell, for fair!"

"I'll send *you* there, before I'm through!"

"Don't talk like a complete idiot! Can't you see that you have no time to waste? Come on now—let's get busy with the wireless message and the note to the bank. Come on, come on!"

V

AFTERNOON found Martin Wingate ashore, diverting himself as best a prisoner under guard could possibly do; for under guard he most decidedly was. As he wandered along the beach, the eye of the saturnine Zanelli observed him from no great distance.

"This comes to an absolute game of blackjacking and hold-up," Wingate analyzed the situation. He had seen the yacht's tender—long, slender, and speedy—emerge from behind a wooded point and fade away toward the mainland, which he knew lay somewhere off to westward. "The wireless Jaccard forced me to send, and the note I had to give him, will open my safe deposit box for him at the Southern Trust Company, right enough! I'll be lucky if the damned crook doesn't cut and run, after that, and leave me here high and dry!"

The prospect of being deprived of his drug terrified him even more than that of losing a few hundred thousand dollars. He cursed Jaccard, morphine, sea, and sky—everything but his own enslaving habit. In poisonous bad humor, he pushed on along the sand.

Yes, Jaccard had him sewed up, tight and fast—no doubt of that! The captain had him outplayed at every point. Even the chance of escape by suicide was cut off, with the watchful Zanelli ever on guard. Was there anything Jaccard had overlooked? Absolutely nothing, even to the

explanation as to why Wingate needed money.

"Ready cash to close an important real estate deal here at Beaufort," the wireless message had said.

Yes, that would get by. It was reasonable enough to suppose that the yacht had really put in at Beaufort. The wireless in code, and the note signed with Wingate's own signature, would suffice for all demands. Never was any rat in a trap so rat-proof as he was now!

Then hope whispered, as hope always does, in darkest moments:

"Cheer up! Something may happen yet!"

Something, the financier told himself, was bound to turn up before these crooks stripped him bare. But what? His well-known erratic habits favored the plotters. He might vanish from the world, almost indefinitely, without exciting suspicion. More than once he had disappeared for a month or two, without anybody seeming to notice, to care.

"Another sanitarium, perhaps!"—that would cover much.

"Damn them, they may pick me to the bare bones!" Wingate's thought swung back to low ebb. "Never was a plot more carefully organized than this!"

He groaned at thought of adventurers like these making ducks and drakes of his fortune.

It was now financial worry, more than physical pain, that oppressed him. In body, he felt as well as usual—which, though far from good health, was at least bearable. Before Jaccard had taken his departure, Wingate had bought and paid for six more tablets. Though this purchase had used up all his eight thousand dollars, the supply would keep him going for nearly twenty-four hours. He knew that he would be free from pain for practically a whole day—a blessed assurance!

For the immediate present, his real terror lurked in the possibility that Jaccard might never come back at all. Wingate weighed the captain's statement:

"Of course I'll come back, because if I stick with the game I can get more out of it, in the end, than as if I bolted now with what I can get my hands on."

Yes—that sounded reasonable. Wingate could only hope and pray that the captain meant it. Otherwise, unspeakable agony loomed inevitable.

Strange it seemed that human fear and hate and anguish could exist in so halcyon an island! A charming place, that—one of the innumerable sea islands strewn along the Southern coast. Back from the beach rolled dunes, grass-grown and topped with palmettos that whispered in the softest of ocean breezes. Among the semitropical undergrowth wild goats bleated, trampled, browsed—descendants, no doubt, of some that long ago had been cast ashore from shipwrecked vessels, or had been left by fishermen, beach combers, or the like.

The beach itself stretched in a long curve, gleaming in the bright sunshine. Here and there some ship's timber or twisted bit of iron told of hurricanes. Now and again double rows of marks showed where great lumbering sea tortoises had dragged themselves up to lay their eggs, or had again plowed back to the Atlantic.

Underfoot, billions of sea shells glistened and crunched as Wingate trod upon them—small conchs, angel wings, earrings, bull's-eyes, and many another species common to those latitudes. What a paradise for a conchologist! Even in spite of his mental perturbation, Wingate could not refrain from picking up a few, admiring their rare perfection of form, their delicate and lustrous gradations of color. How lavish nature was in wasted beauty!

"Well, I suppose if I've got to be marooned and have my financial throat cut," he grumbled, "it might better be here than in some dingy, ugly place!" He smiled a bit grimly. "At least I'll give Jaccard credit for good taste in picking out his jail for me!"

Lazily the long, creamy surfs rolled in and in, curled over, and broke to swift-running lines of silver spray. Something almost hypnotic soothed the millionaire as he watched the unending succession of blue ridges trundle slowly ashore and crumble to dazzling white. He breathed more deeply than in a good while, straightened his bent shoulders, and felt vague, intangible longings, revocations tenuous as the stuff of dreams.

Scudding flights of sandpipers flitted away before him. Over the surf flapped slow, heavy-billed pelicans, with an immense splashing as they plunged for fish. Afar, like puffs of soot, black ducks cradled in immense flotillas on the sun-sparkled waters.

Under circumstances at all normal, what

a paradise! As Wingate, clad in the most immaculate white, strolled along the shining sands, with the smoke from his cigar drifting on the summer breeze—he looked far other than a trapped victim of greed, with suffering, hate, bafflement, and perhaps bankruptcy all on the cards for him. True, his face was haggard, wan, and wrinkled; but the general effect was that of a rich man who, having come ashore in his cedar dinghy from his anchored yacht, was taking a quiet stroll for his own pleasure along the most delightful of all imaginable beaches.

He walked nearly to the island's northern end, and stood at gaze there. Very far, looms of low-lying shadows told of other islands. To westward, a drift of something miragelike and indeterminate hinted at the mainland. To eastward stretched an immensity of sea, broken only by a single scarf of smudge that bespoke a steamer.

Isolation! A vast, primal loneliness overbrooded sea and sky and all the world. Save for the figure of the alert Zanelli, always on guard, Wingate might have been some modern *Crusoe* on a veritable Juan Fernandez.

"Jaccard certainly made a fine job of it when he picked out this place!" he thought bitterly. "A fellow might stay here a year, and nobody would ever come near him. If I was on Kerguelen, I wouldn't be more out of the world!"

A little tired by the unusual exercise—for, like all addicts, he was physically inert—he turned and retraced his steps toward the cove. Zanelli waited in silence till Wingate had passed, then continued to shadow him. Not so much as by a word or glance did the millionaire recognize the steward's existence. He loathed, he hated Zanelli; and yet somehow it was hard to hate and loathe, on this delectable island.

A certain well-being possessed him, engendered by the cheery sun, the fresh sea air, the feel of the crisp, clean sand. Wingate felt even a touch of the adventurous, the exotic. Yes, the place had—for a few minutes, at any rate—changed his self-centered habit of thought. The millionaire almost forgot his anger, his fear. He could almost find it in his heart to enjoy this island of mystery.

"Really, this place mightn't be so infernally bad, eh?" he murmured with something like a smile. "Under other circumstances, not bad at all!"

Vague ideas of romance, of moonlight on embayed waters, of femininity, drifted through his mind, long a stranger to such thoughts. What a place for a honeymoon! For the first time since he had ragingly jammed his wife's photograph into his locker, he thought of her—of her, whom he had not even seen in so long! A gentler and more human expression softened his tensed features and lighted his eyes.

But this expression faded swiftly as he saw the Voyageur lying there in the little cove. Reawakening his consciousness of degrading servitude and compulsion, the yacht banished every thought but hateful-ness and impotent rebellion.

Forgetting nature's beauties and his own temporarily softened mood, he clenched his thin fists, peered at the yacht with venomous eyes, and cursed the captain with an intense malice shocking to hear.

"I'll have the heart out of you yet, you son of a sea wolf!" he spat, poisoned with a malignant hate beyond all telling.

It was not until next day, toward noon, that Jaccard returned, with the tender and two seamen. He came aboard up the accommodation ladder, and gestured for the sailors to be off. They backed their long, slender craft—powerfully engined, and with a cabin forward—and swung it in a long circle out of the cove, disappearing round a wooded point to southward. No doubt they were withdrawing to some nook or corner of the island which they could use as a base for patrolling the coast, and where they would be out of Wingate's reach, should he think of attempting to bribe them. Evidently Jaccard was not the man to overlook even the most minute detail.

The captain found his victim in bad shape, as the result of having miscalculated the time requisite for the trip. That morning Wingate had used the last of his drug, and once more he was on the edge of the painful gulf.

"Well, so you're here, eh?" he growled, as Jaccard entered his little cabin. "It's about time, I should think!"

"Yes, I'm here," the captain smilingly replied, handing over a bulky package. "Here's what you sent me for—cash, bonds, quite a bundle of stuff. It's all there. I haven't touched a penny of it. Honesty, strict honesty—that's my motto!"

Wingate snarled at him:

"Like hell! If you're an honest man, I'm a wise one! If I *was*, I'd break away from this Gehenna of morphine, and tell you all to go to fire and brimstone, where you belong!"

"Ah, but you *can't* break away, you see!" laughed Jaccard. "You can't, and you know it. You've tried before now, and you've always failed. It's nearly killed you, with suffering."

"That's enough, from you!"

"It's a safe bet no old-timer as a dope fiend—nobody who's been taking the stuff for years—can ever get clear," the captain blandly continued, eying Wingate with enjoyment of his obvious misery. "You'll never get clear. You haven't the stamina, the will power—to be plain, the guts!"

"You know a devil of a lot about me, don't you?"

"I know enough. You're a weakling, and you'll pay through the nose for it. Zanelli and I can clean up a million or more, on you. It's too easy!"

"Too easy, eh? Don't you be so sure!" Wingate threw at him with venom. "I might die, yet, and fool you!"

"Oh, no, you won't die. What is there to kill you, except stopping the dope?" Jaccard laughed with real enjoyment. "And as I said before, you'll never stop. After all, what's your money, compared to the living hell of trying to cut out the stuff? All that a man hath, you know, he'll give for his life."

"You're the devil of a fine man to be quoting the Bible!"

"Well, you know Shakespeare says even the devil can quote it for his purpose; but never mind about that. How many tablets do you want now?"

Wingate would have given the world to shout: "*None!*" at him, and to consign both Jaccard and Zanelli to the bottomless pit; but a compulsion stronger than any will power gripped and bound him. He bowed to it, humbled his pride, and between set teeth growled:

"Give me six—and then clear out!"

"Six it is! All orders promptly and cheerfully filled! Let's see—at fifteen hundred per, that comes to nine thousand dollars. Come on—pay up!"

Cursing, Wingate opened the packet, and with unsteady fingers counted out the money. Jaccard duly delivered the drug.

"When you want any more, just let me know," he said in parting.

Wingate kicked the door shut, even before Jaccard could close it, and shot the bolt. Alone, he swallowed two tablets, took a big drink of water, and sat there shivering, trembling, his every atom poisoned with hate.

Jaccard's mockery and laughter, his contemptuous utterance of such words as "dope fiend" and "weakling," still echoed in the wretched captive's ears. Almost in a paroxysm of loathing for himself and his torturers—yes, even for all mankind—Wingate flung himself into his berth. He lay there, gasping, with a thin glair on his lips. His nether lip was bleeding sullenly, where he had bitten it.

Gradually, however, under the miraculous effect of the drug, pain and tension relaxed. Anger died down to smoldering resentment, like ashes of old fires. A certain degree of peace came to his troubled spirit. He slept.

Next day he awoke to the determination that, come what might, he would break this degrading bondage—that he would never again humiliate himself before these underlings, his own employees. Yes, he might die, but he would never yield. He had forever taken his last tablet!

Brave was the decision, made while some of the drug was still circulating in his veins. Not too difficult was computation of the cost:

"If Jaccard increases the price five hundred dollars a tablet, per day, it will run into impossible money. Why, these hell hounds will have me cleaned out in two or three weeks! I'll beat them to it—I'll quit!"

But gradually the old agony came on again. In spite of every effort to read, to walk the deck of the beautiful yacht, to write letters—to be sent, when?—even to go ashore, the misery increased.

The familiar and appalling sensations of restlessness and aching, the sweating weakness, the ratlike gnawing in the stomach, came once more. Then the heart began to jump and thrash, the raw nerves to quiver; the very bottom seemed to be falling out of the universe. Withal came exhausting fits of sneezing, panic fears, an indescribably horrible sensation of lassitude and pain.

Sleepless, in the most intense and growing torture, Wingate fought the demon till three o'clock in the morning of the third

day. Then, suddenly, half a madman, he capitulated. He could stand no more. His last ounce of strength wrung to exhaustion, on the verge of collapse, and fearing death itself, he rang for Zanelli and told him to summon the captain.

"You don't have to see him, sir," the steward replied, leering with scantily veiled insolence. "I'll do just as well."

"What—what do you mean?" demanded Wingate, haggard and emaciated in those mockingly festive pongee pyjamas.

"I can get you your medicine, sir—and collect for it."

"Get to hell out of here! Send me the captain!"

Zanelli shook a decisive head.

"No, sir. Sorry, but I can't do it. He gave positive orders that he wasn't to be disturbed."

"You insolent pup! Go get him!"

The steward smiled and withdrew. Wingate went trembling, groveling after him, whipped to heel by forces stronger than his utmost will.

From Zanelli's scornful hand he took three tablets, now at two thousand dollars each. Then, loathing, hating himself as no man ever hated and loathed, cursing himself, but thrilled with ghoulisish rapture in possession of his demoniac drug, he staggered feebly back to his cabin and locked himself in.

Laughing, blaspheming, praying, racked and shaken, he dissolved two of the tablets in water and drank the water at a gulp.

Thus presently he found relief again.

But until the red, hot morning burned across the island of torment, he sat there at his desk. He sagged there, beaten, self-hating, in blind despair.

Ahead of him there yawned bottomless abysses, there beckoned miasmatic paths that led—whither?

VI

LIFE for Martin Wingate fell into a singular routine.

Well supplied now with the means of purchase, and with plenty of the drug in sight, the most horrifying fear of his situation—for the immediate present, at least—had been banished. He became as contented as any soul can be that feels itself suspended over hell by one thin thread.

What the future might bring he dared not think. He dared not look ahead and question. Black, terrifying prospects

loomed. Like all of us, confronted with ultimate disaster, he closed his eyes and tried to whisper:

"Somehow, some way, this can be fled away from!"

A morphine victim, if only his daily supply seems assured, adopts the maxim that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; and Wingate reasoned thus. At certain hours, however, especially at night, appalling terrors gripped the unfortunate man—presences of disaster, of agony and death. Now and then his thoughts turned toward the wife and the little son whom he had not only forsaken, but was swiftly ruining, robbing, depriving of the money that—since he would not sacrifice himself—he should have protected for their sake.

At such times, a very Gehenna of torment made him writhe. He fought to put such ponderings away, to bar the gates of memory against them.

Two or three days of lying idle in the stifling yacht—anchored in the cove, and as motionless as "a painted ship upon a painted ocean"—ran the former magnate's nerves ragged. A deadly grind was such inaction under the sun-drenched awnings, on that white-painted, mahogany-paneled, brass-polished thing of beauty. No wicker chairs, no novels or magazines from the yacht's library, no cool drinks chilled by the little ice machine and served by the mockingly obsequious Zanelli, could allay the fever in Wingate's blood. A prisoner, he stifled.

"See here, Jaccard, I can't stand this!" he said at last. "I'd rather have a bit of tarpaulin on the beach, or sleep on the bare sand. Anything to get away from the damned monotony of this double-damned yacht!"

"How about some fishing, sir? There's uncommonly good mullet, sheepshead, and sea bass here, and you might possibly hook a tarpon. We could take the dinghy, and—"

"Who's 'we'? You think I'd go fishing with any of this gang of pirates?"

"You might go with one of the engineers, sir. Neither of them is in on this game. They think you're just an invalid, here for your health. MacIvor's a fine young chap, and Hazeltine's still better."

"No—I'm not going to broil in this sun, for anybody! All I want is to get ashore, where I can stretch my legs, and look at the birds and bugs and ants—if there are

any here. Just to get out of sight of you and Zanelli, anywhere!"

"We really can't let you out of our sight altogether; but we might camouflage ourselves a little, sir. Not a bad idea at all!" Jaccard spoke with the suavity that had always marked his manner before the trap was sprung. Now that all was going as if on rollers, and Wingate no longer belated and cursed him, he had resumed his air of deference—though one sensed that it was the thinnest of masks. "The three of us might as well live ashore."

"You two, as well?"

"Oh, naturally—though not intruding on you unnecessarily. If we were ashore, it would look more like a fishing camp, if anybody happened to cruise in here; and it would certainly be a lot more comfortable. When do you want to go?"

"When? Now!"

"Come along, then, sir. I dare say you'll be surprised."

"At what? After what you've done to me, I guess there's nothing on *this* island to surprise me!"

To this Jaccard vouchsafed no reply. He ordered the one remaining seaman down the ladder into the dinghy tied alongside. This fellow, stolid and silent, rowed Wingate, Jaccard, and Zanelli ashore.

Not five minutes after landing on the beach, Wingate found that the captain had prophesied truly. To say that the millionaire was surprised by what he saw expressed it mildly indeed.

Some three hundred yards back from the shore, in a small clearing edged with palmetto thickets, he found a couple of little portable houses—bungalows, rather—with broad porches and well screened windows. He stared at them with contracted, varnished-looking eyes.

"How the devil did *these* get here?" he demanded. "Somebody been here before, and left them?"

"No, sir. As you see, they're quite new," replied Jaccard. "So far as I know, Tortugas Key hasn't been occupied in a good many years. I had these little huts brought out here and stuck together, when the idea first occurred to me about this pleasant game we're playing."

Struck dumb, the millionaire could only make an odd, gulping noise; but in a moment words came.

"Well, by God! You *are* a thorough-going crook, I must say!"

"Thanks, sir," returned the captain, not perturbed. "Anything that's worth doing at all, you know—"

He knocked out the dottle of his pipe, in his broad hand, and filled the bowl once more.

"Yes," he went on, "I made every sort of provision for the affair. It was a bit of a job, I'll admit, getting these portable houses freighted out here and set up. Cost me a tidy lot of money, too; but it's turning out a good investment. Hope you'll like your quarters, sir. I'm sure you will, after you've looked 'em over."

Wingate uttered a short, explosive laugh.

"You're a wonder!" he exclaimed, with real admiration. "Better cut this kidnapping, blackmailing, conspiring game, and come into my office as a partner. In the legitimate business game, with your brains, energy, daring, and foresight, you would—"

"No, thanks, sir! I never cared for business. The sea for mine! Once I make my pile out of this present matter, I'm off. My next address will be somewhere east of Suez; but never mind about me. You're the only important factor here. Take a look at your little camp, sir, and see how you like it."

Amazed, Wingate followed his captor to the larger of the bungalows. Jaccard threw open the door, and stood aside for him to enter through a broad, screened porch.

A pleasanter and more homelike little place it would have been difficult to fancy. Wingate saw two rooms, coolly carpeted with grass rugs; a well cushioned wicker couch; a trim white iron bed. He saw hooks and shelves in abundance; lamps all filled and ready; window shades and muslin curtains swaying in the sea breeze that came through half a dozen well screened windows.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"I hope not," smiled the captain. "That is, not till after you and I have got through our little matter of business. If you're satisfied here, all you've got to do is move in. It's pretty nearly complete, but I'll fix it up a bit more for you. All the comforts of home, you see! Here's your thermos bottle, for cold drinks. Here's your washstand, all slick as pins. You'll be snigger than the majority of bugs."

"You've got me all dated up for a long stay, I guess, eh?"

"That depends on how long your money

holds out—or such money as I can get at, without running my neck into any nooses. I'll have some of the wicker chairs from the yacht put in here—the library, too, and the phonograph. Your meals will be served here, hot or cold—vacuum containers, you know; though a man in your situation may not care much for eating. Here's an electric push button. It's wired to a bell in the other camp. Either Zanelli or I will be on duty there all the time. You've only got to punch that button, to get service—medical or otherwise. Fact is, I've done everything for your comfort here that I could think of."

"I should think you might," sneered the prisoner, "with me paying for it all, at anywhere from ten or twelve thousand dollars a day up!"

"It comes high, but we have to have it," Jaccard mocked. "You'll admit there's everything here—or is going to be—that any reasonable man might want."

"Yes," said Wingate caustically, "everything, except the one thing all Americans insist on—liberty!"

"Ah, we won't discuss that," replied the captain, with a wave of his massive hand; "but otherwise it's satisfactory?"

Wingate nodded silently.

"And you've decided to take it?"

"Go to the devil!" the millionaire flared out. "What else can I do?"

Jaccard laughed with an enjoyment that turned the iron in the captive's soul. What would he not have given for revenge on this tormentor?

Brooding, Wingate went to a window and stood looking through the palmettos at the sunlit glimpse of blue that marked the sea—the sea, beyond which lay liberty.

Within two hours, everything he wanted had been brought from the *Voyageur* and cozily installed. The bungalow assumed a homelike air. Wingate took charge of the moving in, and even carried some of the things. Anything for employment!

Looking over his desk and lockers, he came upon the photograph of Constance and little Hugh. A stab of shame pierced him as he looked at the bent frame and the broken glass. He removed the photograph, laid it carefully in a book, and carried the book ashore with him.

In the bungalow he set the photograph on one of the shelves, and for a moment stood silently regarding it. Then, impas-

sively, he turned away. After all, a man like himself—what had such to do with wife or son? "Dope fiend!" The captain's words echoed in his memory. Wingate flushed dully through his parchment skin, and busied himself arranging the books brought in boxes by the seaman.

But once or twice his glance flitted to the photograph, and for a moment rested there.

Existence dropped into a languid routine that would have been idyllic, if under its apparent calm the grim reality of a most slavish incarceration had not lurked.

Tortugas Key was a terrestrial paradise, for the most part; though toward its southern end lay low, swampy land, about which Jaccard cautioned the prisoner.

"No telling, you know, sir, what kind of snakes and things might be down that way!"

Wingate was apparently free to come and go, to read, smoke, or loaf about, to amuse himself as he liked. He explored most of the island, casually, as his strength permitted. He knew that the tender was hidden away in some cove or other, as a patrol, in case he should make any attempt to escape—though how that could possibly be done he failed to understand—but he never found any trace of the little vessel. Perhaps, thought he, it might lie in some creek or inlet in the swampy part of the island, which he dared not penetrate. Jaccard's remark about snakes stuck in his memory. Rattlers, cotton-mouthed moccasins, venomous Southern reptiles—no, the millionaire wanted no encounters with such!

He found that the island was about two miles long and from half to three-quarters of a mile wide, much indented with bays and lagoons, and well wooded with palms, palmettos, live oaks, water oaks, and gum trees. In the woods, the branches drooped under immense streamers of gray Spanish moss, through which the breeze sometimes made eerie little whistlings, as of elvish orchestras. In places, wild grapevines and lianas knit the trees with fantastic loopings. Holly and mistletoe grew there, too; and at sight of these the captive's eyes would soften with memories.

"Damned strange that the symbols of the Northern Christmas grow only down here in the South!" he mused.

Holly, mistletoe! Wingate did not like to see them. Too poignantly they evoked

other and better days. Still, on one of his rambles, he broke off a spray of holly with gay red berries, which he took to his bungalow and laid on the shelf under the photograph of Constance and little Hugh. The mistletoe he could not reach, for that grew high in topmost branches.

"What an infernal fool I am!" he sneered the next day, and threw the spray into the wastebasket beside the wicker table that had been brought from the Voyageur; but on the day after that, he picked it out of the basket again, and replaced it on the shelf.

Days passed, each like the rest, save when some sudden, drumming rainstorm burst over sea and island, only to be swiftly followed by a glorious clearing off, golden and crimson as the sun set over bright waters. A horrible ennui possessed the captive. Much as his drug habit had made him hate and shun his fellow men, he found that after all he missed even slight contacts with them.

The lack of any business news chafed and irked him unspeakably. Books bored him. His attention wandered, and he could read no more than a page or two, even in his most capacious chair on the screened porch, without tossing his book away and cursing its author.

"What do they know about stories?" he would growl. "Damned pack of lies, made up out of whole cloth! If they'd only come to me, now, I could give them a story!"

But at the thought that his story might ever become known, he shrank and quivered. No, no, come what might, never should the world know this shameful thing that had befallen him!

Driven desperate by idleness, he finally overcame his aversion for fishing, and decided to go out with Jaccard. With the engineers he would not associate, fearful lest they might in some way, through some slip of his tongue, fathom the real situation. He ordered the dinghy, and had tackle and bait prepared.

That little expedition was the first of several. For some hours he and his jailer would sit silently in the boat, out on some calm lagoon where now or then porpoises breached, or where a shark finned up. There they would try their Waltonian luck, which was usually good. How could it be otherwise, in such teeming waters?

Once Wingate hooked a tarpon, but he lacked strength to land it. He had to pass

the rod to Jaccard, and could do no less than admire the captain's strength and skill in a two-hour battle that began in a cove and ended more than a mile at sea.

That day the two men talked together almost like friends. Even the captive's hate was for the moment forgotten in the enthusiasm of battle; but after the huge fish lay on the Voyageur's deck, the old sullen spirit returned. Wingate remembered that this very day Jaccard had robbed him of forty thousand dollars.

"If only I could fix it some way to blow up the yacht, with Jaccard and Zanelli aboard!" he darkly pondered, his heart leaping at the thought.

Yes, gladly he would have sacrificed that half-million-dollar marvel, for vengeance's sweet sake!

The island offered splendid shooting. Ducks of many kinds—mallard, teal, red-head, diver—swarmed all about it. There was a colony of egrets, too, and one of flamingos. So many miles at sea, who was there to enforce game laws? But though Jaccard and Zanelli now and then brought in a few wild fowl, which made a welcome change in the menu, they never invited their prisoner to hunt with them. Fishing tackle was all very well to put into Wingate's hands, but firearms—never!

The captive chafed under his restrictions—chafed bitterly, with much red-hot profanity. The whole thing was a ghastly mockery. Here he was on this paradisiac island, with every want supplied save one, and that one was the greatest of all—freedom! Though his jailers' watchfulness never became obtrusive, still he always felt it lurking, spying. Always one or the other of them remained in sight. They haunted him like an obsession.

"Prison—that's what it is!" he fumed. "And a damned sight stronger prison than any ever built of stone and steel. I'm in prison here, and at fabulous expense per day!"

In the rare moments when his mind grew completely lucid, he would pace the floor of his bungalow, agonized with hate and humiliation, mentally inflicting the most hideous punishments on the captain and Zanelli, imagining vain things.

On the morning of the tenth day he awoke to a terrible realization. His money was running dangerously low again, and he would have to send for more. Every day, just at noon, Jaccard presented himself for

payment, and for the delivery to Wingate of the morphine ration for the following twenty-four hours. Now hardly enough money remained for one day more.

Wingate had standardized his dosage at ten grains per diem. The daily price having advanced five hundred dollars a grain, eleven days' supply had cost him more than three hundred thousand dollars. Merciful Heaven!

This discovery gave Wingate a terrific shock.

"To-morrow will cost me sixty-five thousand," he realized; "and the day after, seventy. I won't have that much money left. I'll only have enough for four grains!"

That spelled agony. Out of his fool's paradise of temporary relief there surged a specter of torment, perhaps of death.

"Good Lord, I've got to get busy again, and raise a lot more money!"

So indeed it fell out. Jaccard remained adamant against any suggestion of a final cash settlement—the prisoner to pay a lump sum and to receive his liberty.

"Nothing doing, sir," said the captain, sitting with Wingate on the bungalow porch, and very contentedly smoking an excellent cigar. "That is, unless you make over all your business and real estate holdings to me, and stay here under guard till I can cash in on them. After that, I'll come back and release you. No—better still, I'll wireless Zanelli to take you ashore."

"What?" exclaimed Wingate, aghast.

"Oh, yes, I've thought it all out," the captain went on. "It can be worked easily enough. By the time you get ashore, I'll be—elsewhere. Zanelli can take care of himself. He'll make his get-away, all right enough, and later I'll whack up with him."

"You insufferable scoundrel!" snarled Wingate. "Give you all I've got, and ruin myself?"

"Well, why not? You're ruined, anyhow. What are you worth to yourself, to your wife and family, or to anybody else? You're a drag on them and on your business. You've got no will power left, no manhood. There's nothing ahead of you but to go nutty and die in a padded cell. Besides, what is it to me whether you're ruined or not? I'm looking out for myself. Well, what do you say? Buy yourself free with your whole wad, at once, or shall I get the code book again and frame out another touch on the bank?"

Unable to speak, Wingate choked and gasped. His wan face grew livid, distorted, horrible. His clawlike hands gripped the arms of the chair. A soul in hell, he writhed.

Jaccard laughed easily, and got up.

"Well, which is it to be?"

"Go get—get the code book!" gulped the millionaire.

An hour later, from the beach at one point of the cove, he heard the rapid-fire *prrrrrrr* of the powerful tender, and presently saw it slitting the sea, westward bound. Aboard it was Jaccard, with the two seamen.

Wingate's face, as he watched the speedy craft melt into the semitropical haze and fade away over the long swell, was a mask of such agony as Doré never drew in his pictures of the inferno.

"Oh, God, if it would only catch fire, burn, sink!" he groaned. Then, after a pause: "Prison—and I've turned the key on myself!"

He cursed himself. Then, with bent head, dejected and abased to the depths, he dragged back to the bungalow. He flung himself down on the wicker couch and abandoned himself to loathing and self-hate.

Another day of torment dragged to its infernal close.

VII

JACCARD, returning on the morrow, brought more than money and securities.

"There were three letters for you at the bank, sir," he explained, handing them over. "The teller asked me to deliver them."

"Damn the letters!" mouthed Wingate, and tossed them spitefully upon the wicker table. "Last thing I told my New York office, before I started South, was that no mail should be forwarded—nothing at all!"

Captain Jaccard shrugged indifferent shoulders.

"Well, those came through, anyhow." A pause. "Ready for some more medicine, sir?"

"What do you think, you fool?"

"I think the compliment applies to you, sir, rather than to me. However, that's none of my business. Here's the packet of cash and bonds, sir. You'll find everything O. K., as listed. How many grains? Ten, as usual?"

Like a snarling dog, Wingate took the ten precious tablets and paid for them.

"Get out, now!" he growled. "Make yourself scarce, you infernal crook!"

"Easy, easy!" the captain cautioned. "You be good, or I'll shut down on you altogether, money or no money!"

With which dire threat he departed, leaving the captive to his misery; but almost on the moment he returned.

"Well, what the devil do you want now?" grated Wingate.

"I want eight of those tablets."

"Eh?"

"You're getting into a state where it's not safe to let you have more than two at a time. You might take an overdose, through spite, or excess of pain, or what not, and I'd lose the best business prospect I've ever had."

"You—you—"

"Never mind! Hand them over!"

When Wingate would have resisted, Jaccard held him as if he had been a child, and took the tablets by force. Not much force was needed, at that. Wingate felt himself helpless in those iron hands.

"Here, now—here's the money that doesn't belong to me—not yet," said Jaccard. "Everything is honest and above-board. Besides, it 'll all be coming back to me before long. That's all. So long!"

Again he took his leave. It was more than two hours before Wingate, under the influence of his tablets, regained any sort of composure. Debased by this new humiliation, ground into the very dirt of a strong man's scorn, he shuddered before the picture of his own degradation.

As he sat there by the table, tasting the gall and wormwood of hate, of misery and shame, his pin-point eyes fell on the letters. He clawed them toward him and ripped one open.

It was from his college class secretary—something about a donation to help establish a scholarship.

"Pah! Always begging!" he spat, tore the letter into shreds, and hurled it into the basket. "How about this one?" He opened the second. "H-m!" he grunted, as his blurred vision focused. "What the devil, now? From Burgess, eh? So that new Florida development scheme at Santa Maria looks as if it was going to fall through, after all!" He tried to ponder, but all his thoughts seemed woolly. "If it *does* fall through, I stand to lose anywhere from three hundred thousand to twice that. Ah, well, what's the difference, anyhow?"

That letter, too, whisked into the basket, in a shower of fragments.

"If I was only down there at Santa Maria," he said bitterly, "I could pull that proposition out of the fire in no time. God, wish I *was* there!" He laughed. "Might as well wish I was on the moon, and be done with it!"

The third letter gave him an agonizing start. He knew that writing on the envelope. It was his wife's!

Why had he grown indifferent to that woman? Why had he so spitefully used her? Why, save that the drug had bred in him a cruel and perverse heart?

Once he had loved her as few men love their wives. Courtship and marriage had been a dream—now a wonderful, far-off dream, whereof the memories were torment. All enwoven with that dream were recollections of how their home had been established—their two homes, rather—the winter house on Central Park West, and the summer cottage at Lake Sebago—not to count the camp at Eau Gallie, down on Indian River. Enwoven, too, were reminiscences of how all his affairs had prospered, with Constance a good partner and true pal. Then had come the birth of Hugh, and then the war—and after that, the entering in of the serpent into their Paradise.

Love had seemed to die, then, crushed and poisoned by that deadly serpent. Wingate remembered his wife's long, losing fight to save him; her pleading and her patience and all her ineffable but unavailing bravery; her faith in him, so often betrayed by supine relapses after the "cures"—oh, a thousand things!

He felt he hated her. But why? In his soul, where all things lay clotted and congealed by the serpent's touch, how seek for reasons? "Each of us kills the thing he loves." Well, had he not killed Constance—or worse? More than two years had dragged away since he had seen her; more than a year since he had even heard from her. He had forced her out of his life and his thoughts, thrust her out of his soul's house and banged the door.

Oh, yes, he had provided liberally for her and Hugh, of course; but he had locked the door, and told them that they could never come in again. There was no room there for them, with the drug, too!

Sometimes he had wondered whether Constance had changed much. And Hugh, little Hugh—nearly twelve years old now;

quite a boy, eh? Two years change a boy. He supposed Hugh was all right. They took excellent care of boys at St. Philip's School; but—

"What the devil and all is Constance writing me about, now?" Wingate snarled. Wan, wrinkled, unlovely, he was a sad mockery of the man Constance had married. "I told her I didn't want to hear from her again! Why couldn't she go to my lawyers, instead of pestering me?"

Mentally he vowed that if ever he won out of Jaccard's trap alive, somebody in the New York office was going to get the sack for having forwarded that letter. He was half minded to tear it up unread, and fling it into the basket; but somehow he could not quite force himself to that. Hugh! There might be news of the boy. Sick, perhaps, or—

The prisoner began to tremble, to feel a sinking around the heart. He held the letter undecidedly. The sight of that familiar writing, angular, bold, on the fine gray envelope, oddly affected him. Something of his wife's compelling personality seemed to diffuse itself from it, to affect him with a singular nostalgia.

For an instant, almost as in a vision, he seemed to perceive the woman herself, lithe, slender, vivid; to see the tilt of her chin, the curve of her throat, the shadow of her hair across her cheek.

He swore, gulped, and tore open the envelope. The words of Constance's letter blurred and ran together oddly under his blinking eyes:

DEAR MARTIN:

Forgive me for breaking my promise and for writing to you, but you won't refuse me a bit of advice, just for old times' sake, will you?

Some rather unpleasant developments have taken place, and I need your judgment. It's in the matter of Uncle Melvin's will. Judge Furchgott has just ruled against me, and I'm afraid most of the estate will go to the Farringtons. This is a serious blow, Martin. We can't afford to lose all that money—not till Hugh is out of school, anyhow. If you could come to New York, only for a day or two, and confer with Hamilton & Gavin, couldn't something be done about appealing the case, or holding up the settlement till you could put in the evidence about undue influence, and all that? I mean the evidence that only you know about.

Another thing, Martin—I hate to ask you, but frankly, I need a little money. If I could only explain, you'd know why. Please don't misunderstand me—

Wingate almost barked an oath. Dark with rage, he ripped the letter into shreds

and shot them into the basket. He sat there gnawing his nails, cursing.

"Money, always money!" he wheezed. "Three letters—two of 'em begging, and one about losing money. Damn money! Damn *everything*!"

He sprang up and fell to pacing the floor like a madman; but his heart would not stand the strain. He grew faint and dizzy, and felt himself about to collapse. Morphine! He must have another tablet. In every strain or crisis, the addict invariably turns to his drug, his panacea.

He tottered to the push button and rang and rang and rang. Then he sank into his wicker chair and remained there, spent and panting.

Jaccard presently appeared, with a knowing smile.

"Bad news, eh?" he cheerfully asked, his eye observing the fragments lying in the basket and littered all about it. "Well, that comes to everybody now and then. Believe me, I'm very sympathetic."

"To hell with you and your infernal sympathy!" almost shrieked the miserable wretch. "Give me a tablet, and be quick about it!"

"No, sir, I couldn't do that, you know," the captain mocked with rare malice. "I couldn't give you one, sir, under any circumstances whatever. I'll sell you one, though."

Had Wingate possessed any weapon, he would have tried to do downright murder. Having none, all that he could do was to wave his fists, blaspheme, and make himself an object of shocking derision. It was only after a grotesque and terrible scene that he got his tablet, and Jaccard, ever richer, departed.

Wingate remained staring at the tablet, lying there on a book upon the wicker table. He advanced his shaking hand to seize it, but before his fingers closed upon it he drew the hand back.

"The will!" he gulped brokenly. "The court has ruled against her. Hugh! I've got to go back. Nearly two million at stake. My God, what next?"

He tried to think, but everything mingled in extraordinary confusion in his whirling brain. Thoughts of his probable loss at Santa Maria mixed up and blent with Constance and the boy, with his huge payments to Jaccard—why, the stuff was costing him sixty thousand dollars a day! And to-morrow more, and ever more and more

and more! Merciful Heavens, Croesus himself couldn't endure it!

As in a horrid nightmare he perceived his whole life crashing down—money, business, power, everything streaming away and going to perdition; his wife, his son, his honor, being engulfed in the general ruin.

"All going, everything, in one hideous wreck!" he groaned. Hatefully his eyes fastened on the tablet. "And all because of you, you accursed demon! All because of you!"

Suddenly something seemed to clear in the nebulous whirl of his tormented consciousness. His head came up, almost with some semblance of assertion. From his dulled, lackluster eyes there gleamed a spark of the old-time fire.

He laughed, did Martin Wingate. A strange, ghastly mockery of laughter it was, wild and hollow, such as might reëcho on the Brocken at some demons' festival. It was a macabre, graveyard sort of laugh—but still a laugh.

Wingate leaped up, snatched the tablet, and strode to the window. He jerked up the screen, and, with a spasmodic effort, moving like some badly jointed marionette, threw the morphine tablet out—the tablet that had just cost him six thousand dollars. As far as he could hurl so slight a thing, he threw it.

The tablet, a mocking white wink, sped spinning through the sunshine, the hot and brooding sunshine of that semitropic island. It struck the leaf of a Spanish bayonet near the edge of the little clearing. It ricocheted. Wingate saw it flicker away and vanish in the sand at the base of a palmetto.

With another and shriller laugh, he slammed down the screen, turned, fell into his big wicker chair, and dashed both fists against his bursting forehead.

"Now!" he gulped. "Now for it! Now for hell!"

VIII

NIGHT—a night of splendid moonlight—found the millionaire gripped and throttled by an anguish so intolerable as to pass all powers of description.

Racked by pain in every joint, bone, and nerve, twisted and torn, sweating, groaning, transfixed with barblike darts of torture, he staggered back and forth through the two dark rooms of his bungalow.

He had all shades pulled down, to hide his torment from the hateful eyes of Jac-

card and Zanelli. A single lamp burned on the table, turned very low. The stifling heat made the place an oven. A normal man could hardly have caught his breath there. As for Wingate, he was breathing only in panting gulps.

His heart was acting very badly. Bump, thump, bump, it would go—and then an awful vacancy, a skip. He thought everything was over; but no—again the thumping started.

Gripping his breast, doubled half over, he limped back and forth. His shadow, black and huge, grotesquely mocking him, wavered along the walls. In a sort of hallucination, the shadow seemed a devil, his own evil genius, trailing him, waiting to seize and slay him.

He stopped, shook impotent fists at the shadow, cursed it, and then again took up that limping hobble. Groans of mortal agony accompanied his convulsive shuffling. A grim battle, that—a battle to the very death!

At last, able to walk no more, he dropped on his bed and lay there, twitching. His bony fingers clenched, his body twisted with dolorous cramps, he fought for very life. Now he moaned, now he swore, now he mouthed his wife's name and his boy's. Even his curses, on that rack of torment for their sake, were prayers.

Two hours he lay thus, while the ocean murmured on the island beaches, and while the moon moved majestically toward mid heaven. What was the beauty of that Southern night to him? What was any beauty, anywhere? Demons of ugliness, nightmare fiends of torture, had their grip upon him.

"Oh, God, if I could only die!" he gritted. As a corollary to that wish, realization came: "If I *were* dead, they'd be far better off!"

Disjointed thoughts of his heavy insurance policies passed through his mind. Thank goodness, they were paid up. There could be no cavil or question. The fact of his death must sooner or later be established, and then—

Then perhaps Jaccard and Zanelli might find the gallows beckoning, or the electric chair. Then, surely, Constance and Hugh would never want for anything.

"God! Why can't I die?"

But no, life still struggled in him. The man's naturally splendid constitution still battled for him. Not yet had his desper-

tion reached the stage of suicide. All he could do was to live and suffer; to writhe in deadly pangs, but still to live on and on and on.

Of a sudden, after still another hour of this steadily increasing torture there in the stifling gloom, Wingate struggled up. He sat huddled on the edge of the bed, drooping and haggard, a creature fearful to look upon.

For a while he held his aching head—devils seemed to be driving wedges into it—between both quivering hands. Then, as if his last rag of will power had torn away, he staggered to his feet with a blistering oath. All limits of endurance past, he stumbled toward the door. He reached it, hauled it open, and shuffled out on the porch.

Never had a more lovely night rested like a benediction upon a tired world. Slow surfs boomed along the beaches. In the palmettos, the night breeze seemed whispering secrets that no man should ever understand. The moon, a white round glory in the deepest of purple skies, irradiated the gleaming sands. The silver light slashed shadows like sticks of India ink across the porch floor, over the dunes, the clearing.

A few of the bolder stars dared to show their tiny candles, despite the moon. Somewhere, in thickets unseen, fluted the notes of a Southern whippoorwill—double notes, not triple like those of the North, but still reminding Wingate of nights long gone. Once there had been a night, at Sebage, almost like this!

The prisoner groaned, supporting himself against the side of the bungalow, swaying there.

He stood for a minute, still undecided. Then, unable to bear the inhuman anguish, he crept toward the screen door, opened it, and lagged down the steps. Hardly able to crawl, none the less he managed to force his way along.

Yes, he remembered—the Spanish bayonet, and then the palmetto! He dragged himself toward the palmetto, trembling with eagerness, his face writhen and evil in the moonlight.

Driven on by demons more cruel than any ever imagined by Dante, he reached the palmetto, fell on his bony knees there, and began his search for the precious tablet.

Six thousand dollars' worth of relief! Not even a man of his means—now swiftly

and shot them into the basket. He sat there gnawing his nails, cursing.

"Money, always money!" he wheezed. "Three letters—two of 'em begging, and one about losing money. Damn money! Damn *everything*!"

He sprang up and fell to pacing the floor like a madman; but his heart would not stand the strain. He grew faint and dizzy, and felt himself about to collapse. Morphine! He must have another tablet. In every strain or crisis, the addict invariably turns to his drug, his panacea.

He tottered to the push button and rang and rang and rang. Then he sank into his wicker chair and remained there, spent and panting.

Jaccard presently appeared, with a knowing smile.

"Bad news, eh?" he cheerfully asked, his eye observing the fragments lying in the basket and littered all about it. "Well, that comes to everybody now and then. Believe me, I'm very sympathetic."

"To hell with you and your infernal sympathy!" almost shrieked the miserable wretch. "Give me a tablet, and be quick about it!"

"No, sir, I couldn't do that, you know," the captain mocked with rare malice. "I couldn't give you one, sir, under any circumstances whatever. I'll sell you one, though."

Had Wingate possessed any weapon, he would have tried to do downright murder. Having none, all that he could do was to wave his fists, blaspheme, and make himself an object of shocking derision. It was only after a grotesque and terrible scene that he got his tablet, and Jaccard, ever richer, departed.

Wingate remained staring at the tablet, lying there on a book upon the wicker table. He advanced his shaking hand to seize it, but before his fingers closed upon it he drew the hand back.

"The will!" he gulped brokenly. "The court has ruled against her. Hugh! I've got to go back. Nearly two million at stake. My God, what next?"

He tried to think, but everything mingled in extraordinary confusion in his whirling brain. Thoughts of his probable loss at Santa Maria mixed up and blent with Constance and the boy, with his huge payments to Jaccard—why, the stuff was costing him sixty thousand dollars a day! And to-morrow more, and ever more and more

and more! Merciful Heavens, Cræsus himself couldn't endure it!

As in a horrid nightmare he perceived his whole life crashing down—money, business, power, everything streaming away and going to perdition; his wife, his son, his honor, being engulfed in the general ruin.

"All going, everything, in one hideous wreck!" he groaned. Hatefully his eyes fastened on the tablet. "And all because of you, you accursed demon! All because of you!"

Suddenly something seemed to clear in the nebulous whirl of his tormented consciousness. His head came up, almost with some semblance of assertion. From his dulled, lackluster eyes there gleamed a spark of the old-time fire.

He laughed, did Martin Wingate. A strange, ghastly mockery of laughter it was, wild and hollow, such as might reëcho on the Brocken at some demons' festival. It was a macabre, graveyard sort of laugh—but still a laugh.

Wingate leaped up, snatched the tablet, and strode to the window. He jerked up the screen, and, with a spasmodic effort, moving like some badly jointed marionette, threw the morphine tablet out—the tablet that had just cost him six thousand dollars. As far as he could hurl so slight a thing, he threw it.

The tablet, a mocking white wink, sped spinning through the sunshine, the hot and brooding sunshine of that semitropic island. It struck the leaf of a Spanish bayonet near the edge of the little clearing. It ricocheted. Wingate saw it flicker away and vanish in the sand at the base of a palmetto.

With another and shriller laugh, he slammed down the screen, turned, fell into his big wicker chair, and dashed both fists against his bursting forehead.

"Now!" he gulped. "Now for it! Now for hell!"

VIII

NIGHT—a night of splendid moonlight—found the millionaire gripped and throttled by an anguish so intolerable as to pass all powers of description.

Racked by pain in every joint, bone, and nerve, twisted and torn, sweating, groaning, transfixed with barblike darts of torture, he staggered back and forth through the two dark rooms of his bungalow.

He had all shades pulled down, to hide his torment from the hateful eyes of Jac-

card and Zanelli. A single lamp burned on the table, turned very low. The stifling heat made the place an oven. A normal man could hardly have caught his breath there. As for Wingate, he was breathing only in panting gulps.

His heart was acting very badly. Bump, thump, bump, it would go—and then an awful vacancy, a skip. He thought everything was over; but no—again the thumping started.

Gripping his breast, doubled half over, he limped back and forth. His shadow, black and huge, grotesquely mocking him, wavered along the walls. In a sort of hallucination, the shadow seemed a devil, his own evil genius, trailing him, waiting to seize and slay him.

He stopped, shook impotent fists at the shadow, cursed it, and then again took up that limping hobble. Groans of mortal agony companioned his convulsive shuffling. A grim battle, that—a battle to the very death!

At last, able to walk no more, he dropped on his bed and lay there, twitching. His bony fingers clenched, his body twisted with dolorous cramps, he fought for very life. Now he moaned, now he swore, now he mouthed his wife's name and his boy's. Even his curses, on that rack of torment for their sake, were prayers.

Two hours he lay thus, while the ocean murmured on the island beaches, and while the moon moved majestically toward mid heaven. What was the beauty of that Southern night to him? What was any beauty, anywhere? Demons of ugliness, nightmare fiends of torture, had their grip upon him.

"Oh, God, if I could only die!" he gritted. As a corollary to that wish, realization came: "If I *were* dead, they'd be far better off!"

Disjointed thoughts of his heavy insurance policies passed through his mind. Thank goodness, they were paid up. There could be no cavil or question. The fact of his death must sooner or later be established, and then—

Then perhaps Jaccard and Zanelli might find the gallows beckoning, or the electric chair. Then, surely, Constance and Hugh would never want for anything.

"God! Why can't I die?"

But no, life still struggled in him. The man's naturally splendid constitution still battled for him. Not yet had his despera-

tion reached the stage of suicide. All he could do was to live and suffer; to writhe in deadly pangs, but still to live on and on and on.

Of a sudden, after still another hour of this steadily increasing torture there in the stifling gloom, Wingate struggled up. He sat huddled on the edge of the bed, drooping and haggard, a creature fearful to look upon.

For a while he held his aching head—devils seemed to be driving wedges into it—between both quivering hands. Then, as if his last rag of will power had torn away, he staggered to his feet with a blistering oath. All limits of endurance past, he stumbled toward the door. He reached it, hauled it open, and shuffled out on the porch.

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A few of the bolder stars dared to show their tiny candles, despite the moon. Somewhere, in thickets unseen, fluted the notes of a Southern whippoorwill—double notes, not triple like those of the North, but still reminding Wingate of nights long gone. Once there had been a night, at Sebago, almost like this!

The prisoner groaned, supporting himself against the side of the bungalow, swaying there.

He stood for a minute, still undecided. Then, unable to bear the inhuman anguish, he crept toward the screen door, opened it, and lagged down the steps. Hardly able to crawl, none the less he managed to force his way along.

Yes, he remembered—the Spanish bayonet, and then the palmetto! He dragged himself toward the palmetto, trembling with eagerness, his face writhen and evil in the moonlight.

Driven on by demons more cruel than any ever imagined by Dante, he reached the palmetto, fell on his bony knees there, and began his search for the precious tablet.

Six thousand dollars' worth of relief! Not even a man of his means—now swiftly

dwindling, moreover—could afford to throw away six thousand dollars! He cursed himself for having been such a fool. He might have known he could not live without that tablet—and more, more, ever more!

"I'll find this one, right enough," he tried to reassure himself. "It's bright as day here, and the tablet's pure white. I'll find it, never fear!"

With burning, feverish eyes he peered about him. He crawled cautiously on all fours. He, a power in the financial world—he, feared in both hemispheres, now abased by vile necessity, crept like an animal, searching, groping. A modern Nebuchadnezzar he was, groveling like a brute beast, and, like that king of olden times, conquered and brought down to shame by powers of evil.

He explored the sand all about, sifting it in fingers that shook, throwing it away and beginning again. As he worked, the sweat of suffering and of abstinence from the drug beaded his forehead, coagulated, ran down into his eyes, and half blinded him. He smeared it away and continued his degrading search.

A grotesque and repellent figure he made, abased and crawling there, twitching with spasmodic pangs, spent, all but perishing.

All at once he uttered an animal-like cry, almost a shout. It burst from his throat, mingled of triumph and despair, joy and torment, as if a lost soul had shouted in exultation at hearing its judgment of eternal doom.

"Here it is, by God!"

Wingate's questing fingers had closed on the precious, the damnable, the adored and hated tablet!

With a palsied hand he raised it toward his lips; but suddenly his muscles stiffened, and the hand stopped. It seemed to him that he saw a dark figure lurking among the palmettos. He blinked, and now saw nothing. So, then, it was merely an hallucination? To his fevered brain the figure had appeared like Constance.

A flood of disjointed memories surged back. His wife's letter! What was that white gleam he saw? Her letter? Her appeal for her self and for the boy—for both of them, whom he was ruining?

With an odd little cry, Wingate crushed the tablet between his fingers. He ground it to powder and flung the powder away. He staggered up, laughing horribly, and like a madman stumbled off among the pal-

mettos, striking against them, falling, scrambling up again.

The sea, the sea! There at last he could find cooling and peace, rest, oblivion, surcease from pain. The sea would give him all these. To his wife and boy it would give freedom from his squandering, it would give wealth.

Passionately, as he never had desired anything, he longed for the embraces of our primal mother, the compassionate and all-consoling sea.

But now, as he staggered along the sand between the palmettos—a crouching and grotesque figure in his white flannels—he became conscious of something in his path. It lay half in moonlight, half in shadow. An evil, sinuous, horrible thing it was, watchful and awake. The moon revealed it as a snakelike thing of chestnut brown, with obscure blackish bars. Tiny high lights glittered in its cold, malicious eyes. Its form was graceful, with the repellent grace of a thing supremely efficient only in inflicting death.

It drew back, slightly, as Wingate shuffled toward it; raised its flattened, triangular head, and gaped horribly. Its jaws widened till they extended rigid and almost in a straight line. Two needle-like fangs protruded, gleaming portents of swift destruction. The mouth showed white as cotton.

Thus the thing waited—the most deadly reptile of those Southern coasts and islands—a cottonmouth moccasin!

For a second or two Wingate paused and hesitated. He stood there swaying slightly, staring, and pressed a hand to his forehead. He laughed feebly.

"Crazy, eh? Fever—seeing snakes, already?" It sounded uncanny, shuddering. Silence followed. Then, as the wretched man peered closer: "No, I'm not crazy—yet. This is real! Thank God for it!"

And he lurched forward, laughing again.

Here was certain relief, indeed—here was a solution for all his torture, all his problems, failures, despairs. Why seek the ocean? Failure might await him there. Once in the water, he dimly realized that the life forces still struggling in him might whip him up to efforts, might make him swim and struggle back to land. Always a powerful swimmer, even now the instinct of it could not die. Reflex action would defeat him. He simply could not drown.

But the cottonmouth—yes, that was

sure. There could be no doubt about *that*. Once those fangs had buried themselves in his wasted flesh, no power on earth could save him. Death, absolutely certain, awaited almost within reach of his hand.

Wingate suddenly became sane, sober, and coherent. The mist of half delirium rolled away, leaving his intelligence absolute master of him. His nerves tensed for the final act of his life tragedy. He laughed again, but differently now, as once more he approached the gaping white mouth and gleaming fangs.

"Come on, old friend!" he cried. "Just once—that's all I need! You're stronger than the human snakes that are keeping me here. You and I together—we'll beat them!"

Lightning swift, the moccasin struck. A flash of brown steel, tipped with white, it flicked at him; but, against his will, Wingate had leaped back.

Reflex action! Something stronger even than the lust of death possessed him. He found it impossible to stand, to meet that drive of annihilation. Few men can let a snake strike at them, even behind plate glass, and not jerk back their hands—few, if any. Now forces stronger than Wingate's own desire dominated him. He retreated; but on the instant he checked that retreat.

"You damned cowardly whelp!" he snarled at himself.

He rallied his forces. Shouting, he plunged toward the reptile.

As the moccasin reared for the fatal blow, the staccato bark of a pistol cracked among the palmettos. The snake flailed into a horrible, writhing tangle, its body drilled clean with a bullet.

But its hate of man, its rage and fighting spirit, were not yet dead. Even smitten with destruction, it recovered for an instant, lashed forward, and flung its jaws wide. There in the moonlight Wingate could see those jaws; and in them blood gushed upward out of the reptile's throat like a little fountain, dyeing the white an angry crimson.

The moccasin bubbled blood, made a final stroke, missed Wingate's hand by inches. Then it collapsed in a hideous, thrashing writhe.

Again the pistol barked. The snake's head flew apart, shattered. There came a shouting, the rush of a figure trampling the sand and crashing through the palmettos.

"Here, you crazy fool!" shouted Zanelli. "Here, you!" The guard reached Wingate, now a crumpled heap in the whiteness of the moonlight and the gleaming sand. "Get up, there! What the hell?"

No answer.

Overborne by the shock of it, the unspeakable horror, Wingate had collapsed in a dead faint. He lay there, prone and distorted, his outstretched hand hardly clear of those shattered, deadly jaws.

IX

ONLY now and then faintly groaning, bloodless, emaciated, a wrecked and martyred shell of a man, Wingate lay on his bed. He seemed almost in the pangs of dissolution.

Near him stood Jaccard. The level light of a setting sun, which flooded through the western window of the bungalow, revealed his hard and pitiless face. With his hands on his hips he stood there, regarding the sufferer, who dazedly blinked at him. An ugly grimace contorted his lips.

"Well, when are you coming back to the stuff?" the captain brutally demanded. His suavity of manner had quite departed. "You've got to, sooner or later, you know; so what's the use tormenting yourself like this? Only a damned fool would do it. When?"

"Get out!" Wingate flung at him. "You're poisoning the very air here!" Through all his martyrdom, more fiercely still his hate flared. "Oh, God, if I was only strong enough to get up and kill you!"

"Yes, but you're not," gibed the captain. "You couldn't kill a flea—a poor, spineless wreck of a dope fiend like you!" He broke into an ugly laugh, and then checked it. "The idea of your killing anybody or anything—that's a good one! *You* can't kill anything but your fortune, and your wife's!"

"Here, you!" snarled the millionaire—or hardly a millionaire now, after the ravages of the past fortnight. "Don't you speak her name! I'll have the heart out of you for that!"

Jaccard chuckled maliciously.

"Hear him talk! A devil of a lot you care about *her*!"

Wingate reared up, made a desperate effort, and, racked in every wasted nerve and muscle, got to his feet. He staggered toward the captain, with his quivering fists

up. Jaccard gave him a contemptuous little push that sent him reeling back, to collapse on the bed again.

"Lie down, you weakling!" he mocked. "Why, you couldn't even kill your own worthless self, let alone anybody else!"

"I—I'll kill you yet! My time will come yet!"

"Hop talk!" laughed Jaccard. "That's the way they all rave; but let me tell you this," he added, in a sharper tone, as he glowered down at his victim. "You won't get any more chances to run amuck and kill yourself or try to hurt anybody. You nearly gave us the slip, four days ago—you and that damned snake. Zanelli made good as a guard, though. He got to it first, and winged it just in time."

The victim bared teeth of hate at Jaccard, like a trapped wolf. The captain only sneered, and went on:

"You won't be let out of this bungalow again!" He waved his hand at the windows. All of them were now crisscrossed with iron bars. "There's a padlock on the outside of the door, too. We aren't taking any more chances on you. You're too valuable to lose. There's nothing here you can hurt yourself with, except the bedclothes, and we'll soon fix that. No hanging bee *here!* No metal, either—not even a spoon. From now on you'll claw up your grub out of a paper picnic plate, like a Chink, or a baby. You're here for keeps now; and here—here's your dope for this time!"

He pointed to a paper on the table, with two tablets on it. Save for books and magazines, the table was bare. The lamp had gone from it. Glass lamp chimneys make too fine weapons, when broken—weapons at least capable of slashing a man's wrists or cutting his throat. All the glass had likewise been removed from the windows, which were now like those of a jail.

Wingate's razor was gone, too. Every metal thing had been taken away. So far as the most careful thought of Jaccard and Zanelli had been able to manage it, nothing dangerous remained. The wicker furniture was too light to be used for assault and battery. Even if Wingate had possessed a rope, there was no place where he could tie it, to hang himself. The bungalow had become a cell.

"Here's your dope!" repeated Captain Jaccard.

Wingate made no answer, but lay panting, with the smolder of an immense hatred

in his feverish eyes. Like tiny sentinels of fate the tablets lay there on the table.

"As if you could cure yourself of the habit, you poor, broken wreck of a man!" Jaccard mocked. "Why, the best sanitariums have failed, and the most skillful doctors. You're all gone. Your will power's gone—there's nothing left. Will power—pooh! You're a joke, Wingate—nothing but a joke, to real men! Come on, now, admit it! You are, aren't you?"

Wingate made no reply. Not thus should his enemy badger-draw and bait him. Seeing that no more was to be got out of the victim, by way of diversion, Jaccard turned to the door.

"Well, you know where to find your dope, anyhow," was his parting shot. "You've been without it four days, now. I guess you're about ready to take a shot or two!"

Laughing, he walked out and padlocked the door. Wingate was left alone with his torment.

A long time he lay there, while the blood-red patch of sunlight crept up the wall, faded, and died away. Another night was drawing on—another long, dark misery of awful heat, of breathless stifte and incredible agony. Somewhere, outside a window, a bluebottle fly was buzzing. Far echoes of the surf troubled the air. Save for these, there was silence—a heavy, lonely silence, that weighed like copes of lead.

"Constance!" muttered the wretch on the bed. Then, after a long pause: "Hugh!"

He said no more, but lay oddly huddled, as darkness took the island world.

After about an hour Jaccard and Zanelli came back with a lantern, and with rolls of heavy tarpaulin. They routed Wingate off the bed, took the bed apart, and put it outside, with all the bedding.

"Sheets and blankets make altogether too good ropes, when they're torn up," said the captain. "Even if you can't hang yourself, you might strangle yourself with a rope around your neck, pulled tight. After this you'll sleep on things that you can't tear up—understand?"

Wingate refused to answer. Let them do what they pleased, he had finished dignifying them by even recognizing them. So, presently, they left him alone once more.

Morning found him stretched on the pile of hard tarpaulins, staring at the dawn after

an almost sleepless night. His appearance had become truly shocking. This was the beginning of the fifth day since morphine had passed his lips. He had somehow lived through four days and nights of torment unspeakable, and still he survived.

But the struggle had left deep traces. His pupils were unnaturally dilated. He shook and trembled as with continual palsy. He looked a wreck, if ever there was one. Unshaven now, his scrub of beard accentuated his emaciation. Who could have recognized the one-time athlete, the daredevil aviator?

In only one way he had begun to show improvement—a different and more healthy color had commenced to tinge his face. Pale—yes, Wingate was still ghastly pale; but something of his mummylike yellowness had faded, and his skin had begun to manifest faint traces that blood really circulated beneath it. To this extent, at least, the prisoner had started to “come back.”

As the sun flooded in upon him, he smiled wanly. A more rational expression dignified him. Something like a plan seemed forming in his brain. The driving power of the deepest hate he had ever known was behind that plan, steadying and sustaining him—hate for his tormentors, but especially for Jaccard.

“Dope fiend, coward, weakling!” muttered Wingate. “He called me all that, and he dared to bring in Constance’s name! Well, Jaccard will have to pay for it! Jackal, his name ought to be. He’ll pay, all right—he’ll pay!”

After a while Wingate struggled to his feet and shuffled to where a canvas water bucket was hung from a nail—a nail too small to sustain the weight of a human body. This collapsible bucket was now all that his jailers would allow him. The metal pitcher had been taken away, like all metal. There was not even a tin cup to drink from.

Wingate had to tilt the canvas bucket and drink from its edge, slopping water down his chest. He laughed savagely, drank deep, and laughed again. More scores to settle!

Like a trapped animal, he fell to pacing the floor, back and forth across the fiber rug. Hobbling, racked with pain, he took his exercise—a tortured soul in a hell of his own making.

“They’re waiting for me to give in!” he pondered. “They’re gloating over my pain, and thinking I can’t break off. Leav-

ing *that* there to tempt me!” He stopped and glowered at the drug tablet still untouched on the table. “The devils!”

Of a sudden a new idea glimmered into his brain.

“Let’s see—let’s see!” he muttered, and once more began his pacing of the floor.

A grotesque kind of hobble, that was. His racked, cramped muscles could hardly serve him. He dragged himself along like a wounded, crippled thing.

All at once he straightened up, with the gleam of inspiration in his eye. He went to the bucket, dipped up a palmful of water, returned to the table, and dissolved the two tablets in his hand.

The touch of the stuff revolted him, as if it had been something leprous and pestilential—which indeed it was. Shuddering, he limped to a window and tossed out the morphine solution. Then, laughing harshly, he once more resumed his limping crawl.

An hour later he rang the bell. Jaccard came.

“Well, what’s wanted?”

“You win!” the prisoner said sullenly. “I had to take them.”

“Of course!” sneered the captain. “I knew you would. It’s all off, your fool idea of trying to break away. You *can’t*, and I knew it all along. No dope fiend ever can!”

“Oh, shut up your preaching, you damned scoundrel, and get me another tablet!”

“Cash on delivery!”

“Here!”

Wingate fumbled bills from his pocket. Jaccard told him the market rate for that day, and he paid it. Then the captain put another tablet on the table, and, laughing with mordant scorn, departed, securely padlocking the door.

Once he was well away and out of sight, Wingate dissolved the new tablet and threw it out into the sand.

“I think, by God,” he whispered tensely, “I’ve found the way! I *know* I’ve found the way!”

X

It was on the eleventh night after this that events began shaping swiftly.

Driven by hate of his captors, Wingate had put into effect an amazing stratagem. Day by day he had fought and conquered the gnawing pangs, but he had continued to buy and to destroy the drug. What

matter if the expense was dizzying? Not otherwise could he carry out the plan his clearing brain had conceived.

There had been crises. Some few times Wingate had almost yielded—had thought death at hand; but rather that, now, than to lose his cherished plan of vengeance! In his shaken and emaciated body there still dwelt enough of the old-time stamina to keep his vital machinery going until nature could begin once more to build real strength.

He ate as heartily as he could, letting Jaccard and Zanelli infer that his appetite and his better appearance were resulting from his resumption of the morphine. After deprivation, the drug has this deceitful action of restoring a specious kind of health. As for his improved appearance, he concealed that as much as possible. When his captors came, he usually remained huddled on his tarpaulin, taking particular care not to let them see his eyes. Had they once noticed that the pupils had become normal again, they must have fathomed his secret.

By day, with the shades close drawn, and more especially by night, he had begun carefully graded exercise—not too much at first. His experience as an athlete had taught him how much he could endure; and gradually, bit by bit, he had increased the work. Life had returned, vitality began to flow back. It was too much to expect that any great degree of muscular strength could be so quickly built up; but at all events Wingate had gained nerve control. His body now obeyed him, and his inherent force, to some degree restored, gave promise that in what he was planning to do it would not desert him.

Yes, life had responded to his beckoning, and was coming back again!

One of the strange features of morphine addiction is the readiness of nature to reassert herself, when all the poison is withdrawn. Wingate was now experiencing this. He had worked himself toward health as a galley slave works—sweating, gasping, gaining where he could, fighting to hold every gain. God, what a battle!

Nothing that he could plan had been left undone. On the sixth day he had asked for paper, pen, and ink, saying that he wanted to amuse himself by writing letters. Jaccard had brought these things, with a sneer.

"Fine letters a dope fiend can write! Well, as they'll never be sent anywhere, I don't suppose there's any harm in it."

It had been a struggle for Wingate to hold himself in leash, to keep from hurling himself on the captain and inflicting what damage he might, before that mighty fist should strike him down; but he had restrained himself. His vision fixed on larger issues, he had swallowed the taunt in silence, huddled there like a dog on his rough tarpaulin.

And now the time had come to strike!

Not only did Wingate feel his clarity of mind and strength of body equal to the task, but on this night a tempest of wind and rain, sweeping the island, favored his enterprise. Another such storm might not come for many weeks, blinding the world with darkness, keeping the guards close in their bungalow.

How could they think that their victim, pent behind iron bars, and—as they believed—gripped by the talons of morphine, would try so perilous a conclusion with them as to attempt escape?

Wingate laughed to himself as he made his final preparations. Rough-bearded, still gaunt and haggard, but feeling his blood once more flow clean through his unpoisoned veins, he girt himself for the supreme effort.

His first move, well on toward midnight, was to pour out all but about two quarts of water from his bucket. He worked without a light, of course, lamps not being allowed him; but now and then an eerie flicker of lightning through the wind-flapped shades served to orient him. Into the remaining water he poured the contents of his ink bottle. He took his white flannel coat and jammed it down into the bucket. He stripped off his white trousers and did the same with them. He stirred the clothes around and around, working them well with his hands.

In a few minutes the garments had taken up all the inky water, and had become, if not black, at least somber-hued. A very essential point, this, in a night escape.

He put the wet clothes on again, pocketed all the cash and securities he still had left, and, folding the photograph, carefully slipped that into his inside breast pocket. Then he proceeded with his next step.

This was to pull back the fiber rug in the smaller room of the bungalow, and to finish taking up three boards there. For some nights he had been working at this task, and now it was almost done.

Lacking any tools, he had not tried to

attack the iron window bars. He had concentrated his attention on the floor. First he had carefully located the position of two contiguous beams, as shown by rows of nail heads. Then he had set himself to cutting three of the boards, close inside these rows of nails.

With what, pray, had he worked? With the only thing that remained to him—the steel tongue of his belt buckle.

The boards were of pine. For many hours, night after night, he had patiently dug away the soft wood with the sharp metal tongue. He had gouged it, bit by bit, in two lines. Fighting weakness, sweating, struggling on and on, he had so persevered that now, in less than an hour, the final fibers of wood were picked away.

Using the tongue as a tiny lever, he was able to prize up one of the boards. A few minutes later the other two were free. An aperture measuring about eighteen by twenty-four inches remained before him. Through this, as the occasional lightning splashed the night sky, a pale luminescence gleamed.

"Now, then," thought Wingate, carefully reviewing everything in his mind, "I think the entertainment is about ready to commence!"

Grimly he smiled, as he sat resting for a moment.

His next move was to put on his belt again and draw it tight. Then, taking one of the boards as the best he could do for a weapon, he swung his feet through the opening and slid down to the dry sand, about a yard below—the bungalow, like all such in the South, being set up on posts for the sake of coolness.

Once under the bungalow, he lay still for a few minutes, listening. Save for the steady drumming of rain on the house and on the palmetto fronds, and the roar of the surf as the west wind drove it up the beach, he heard nothing. An occasional dart of lightning revealed no sign of a guard.

"The captain and Zanelli would be bigger fools than I think them," Wingate pondered, "if they stirred out of their own bungalow on a night like this!"

His heart leaped with joyous anticipations. He forgot weakness and exhaustion, nerved to any effort by the task that he had set himself.

All seeming clear, he crawled on hands and knees, reached the edge of the bungalow, and crept out into the storm. A furi-

ous dash of driven rain assailed him; the wind tugged and boistered at him; but he gave no heed. With the piece of board gripped in his right hand, he made way on all fours toward the edge of the palmetto thicket, taking care to keep his bungalow between him and that of his jailers.

His unnaturally dilated pupils now stood him in good stead. Even in the darkest gloom he could make out dim outlines of things, and the intermittent lightning flashes revealed clearing and jungle in every minutest detail. So far as he could make out, not a living thing was in view.

Now he had reached the edge of the thickets. No telling what might lurk there—one of his guards, a poisonous reptile—unknown perils might be awaiting him.

"No matter!" he exulted. "I'm free, so far; and anything is better than that hellish slavery!"

He even found it in his straining heart to laugh at the thought of what Jaccard and Zanelli would say when they discovered the hole in the bungalow floor.

Now he was in the thickets. He stood up, peered cautiously, and advanced. There came a more vivid, nearer splinter of white lightning, followed by a tearing crash. It revealed every leaf and frond, blown, twisted as in torment. It flashed on raindrops that seemed miraculously arrested in mid-air. It showed spun streamers and veils of tormented water. Wingate laughed again, and thrust deeper into the whipping tangle, toward the beach.

Every minute he expected to hear a shout, perhaps the crack of a gun; but nothing came. In a few minutes he had won through the jungle. Bareheaded, drenched with rain that guttered down his body and dyed it with diluted ink, he came to the surf-assaulted sands.

He was a strange figure, staring-eyed, with ragged beard, and with clothes glued to his panting body—a wild, unreal figure, more like some shipwrecked pirate of romance than a New York financier. Life sometimes plays odd jests like these.

Now, on the beach, he could make out the yacht at anchor. She had swung around, her bow toward the west, her stern toward the shore, and was riding easily with no lights aboard. Wingate plowed along the sands and came to the little cedar dinghy drawn up almost to the edge of the dunes. He nodded with satisfaction.

"Now for job number two!" said he.

It taxed his strength to drag the dinghy down into the surf and launch it, to row along the northern side of the cove and around the point there. Had anybody been on watch, Wingate must inevitably have been discovered by the increasing flashes of lightning; but fortune favored him. He rounded the point in the now half swamped dinghy, drove her ashore again, and rolled her bottom up.

With a driftwood club—much more serviceable than his board, which he now discarded—he set himself to put the dinghy permanently out of commission. She was only a little twelve-foot craft, lightly built and finished, with her strakes copper-riveted. The sound of his blows, masked by surf and thunder, could not possibly carry far.

In less than a quarter of an hour he had thoroughly wrecked her, smashing her up beyond any possibility of repair. The leaping surf carried away the broken strakes and strewed them along the sands, for here the wind struck diagonally to the shore.

"There, that's *that!*" exclaimed Wingate, panting, sweating, but exultant.

He broke the oars over an old ship's timber lying bedded in the sand, and flung the pieces into the surf. His heart leaped with exultation. He laughed as he had not laughed in years.

His next move was to locate the tender.

There was just one sure way of finding it, and that was to make the circuit of the island. It would have been a severe enough task even by daylight, and in calm weather. By night, and with a half hurricane tearing at sea and island, it might have appalled the bravest; but Wingate was braver than the bravest now—not through any excess of natural courage, but through excess of hate, through—

The patient search and vigil long
Of him who treasures up a wrong.

Resting only a few minutes, he set off along the beach. Wind and weather tore at him. He bowed his head and pushed forward, leaning against the weight of the storm.

Ghostly, the huge white rollers pitched and tumbled far up the sands, sucking back with a clamor of falling waters. More than a mile he walked, into coves and out, around points, ever hoping by the intermittent play of lightning to get some glimpse of the tender, but in vain.

Finally the beach softened, narrowed, and grew muddy. Wingate found his way impeded by a marshy, black lagoon. He paused, drenched with rain and driven spray, the taste of salt on his lips, panting with the unusual exertion, yet still aflame with the passion of revenge.

Vaguely he could make out tangles of mangrove ahead. What perils might not exist there, from alligator, cottonmouth, unknown reptile? Little cared he!

"Hell, I'd rather die fighting, than be rounded up, dragged back to jail, and die there like a trapped rat!"

He pushed on into the swampy lagoon. A nightmare place it was, fetid, oozy, oversprawled with slimy mangroves that stood up from the water like monstrous and grotesque spiders, like huge, distorted crabs. He could make only a few feet at a time; then, clinging to the mangroves, he had to stop and rest. Bottomless sloughs seemed dragging him down. Only by holding fast to the mangrove branches could he keep from being engulfed.

The place became a horrid dream, stinking and black and deadly, like some Dantean forest of the inferno. Still he battled on and on.

He knew not how far this swamp might extend. It might reach away to the end of the island, and around it to the other shore. Inland he could not penetrate. Turn back he would not. Nothing remained but to labor on, thrashing, falling, clutching, dragging himself by inches through the sucking clutch of it.

How long this torment lasted, how could he tell? He knew only that after an eternity the swamp shallowed, and that he found firmer bottom. Then, bit by bit, the mangroves thinned. Patches of sand beach began to glimmer; and presently he was once more on clean, firm, white footing.

He skirted another cove, pushed around another point, where the palms were streaming like dryads' hair in the gale; and all at once—as a pale blaze of sheet lightning for one instant blotted out the dark—stopped with a cry of exultation:

"There, by God! There it is!"

Wingate had discovered the tender.

It was lying in a tiny cove, made fast to an extemporized wharf of palmetto logs. Doubtless some path, known only to his captors, led from this wharf to the bungalows, through the forest. Their purpose in keeping the boat and the two seamen there

might have been to insure that a patrol would always be ready, in case Wingate should by any possibility escape from the island—a patrol that he could not reach or influence. Again, it might have been to maintain a means of making their own getaway, were any outside interference to take place. No matter! The important fact was that Wingate had found it.

Thrilled with exultation, the fugitive none the less took a little time before his next step. He needed to rest, to recruit his strength.

He sat down on the beach, club in hand, with rain and wind slashing at him, and pondered. The feel of the package of money and securities, and of the photograph in his breast pocket, encouraged and strengthened him. His thoughts reverted to the photograph, and he smiled.

After a time he got up again and advanced to the attack. The storm was passing over now, and the clouds thinning. Off to eastward the faintest possible blur of light was making itself visible. Wingate's dilated eyes could see at least enough outlines of things to guide him.

With his club fast gripped, he silently reached the little wharf and clambered aboard the tender. Without hesitation he banged lustily with the club on the door of the little cuddy, shouting:

"Hello, in there! Tumble out, lively!"

No answer.

"Come, get a move on!" vociferated Wingate, making his voice and words as rough as possible.

For a moment, dread possessed him. Perhaps the two seamen were not aboard. Perhaps they had been withdrawn and were even now on the yacht. In that case, his whole plan might miscarry. The fewer men he had to deal with on the *Voyageur* the greater his chances of success.

But now hope flamed up again. The seamen were here, for a grumbling became audible within the cuddy. A thick voice with a Swedish accent—the voice of a sailor whom Wingate knew as Aalborg—sleepily demanded:

"Who's that? What's wanted?"

"Come on, my hearties! Tumble out! There's trouble at the camp!"

A match rasped, and a feeble light trembled in the cuddy. Wingate could see the shine of it, in a thin line around the cuddy door. Another voice began to rumble, yawningly, with an oath or two.

"Well, are you coming?" shouted Wingate. "Shake a leg, I say!"

XI

OF a sudden the door flung back, and the dim bulk of Aalborg—hulking, stoop-shouldered—vaguely appeared.

As the Swede came lumbering out into the cockpit, Wingate struck. He spared not that blow, but swung the club with all his reviving force. Whether it killed or not, little cared he.

Aalborg went down like a poled ox, sprawling over the gunwale. Wingate made a furious effort, heaved the insensible man, and rolled him out on the rain-drenched wharf. Limp as a sack of potatoes, the seaman lay there, stunned. Lucky for him that his skull was as thick as his wits!

On the instant, with a profane shout, the second man came lunging out of the cuddy, and grappled for the intruder. Wingate drove his club, hit only the shoulder—and the man had him. He felt himself mastered, borne down, wrenched backward. The club skittered away.

For a moment, by the dim tremble of light through the cuddy door, they struggled. The seaman was a match for five such weaklings as Wingate.

No time, now, for the rules of the game! Wingate got hold of a finger and bent it sharply back. Another fraction of an inch, and the bone would have snapped.

Pain-maddened, the seaman for an instant loosed his hold. Wingate slipped down, away. He sprawled into the cuddy. With an incoherent yell the sailor stooped to follow, to trap him there.

Wingate snatched the lamp from its gim-bals and let fly at close range. It struck just above the sailor's eyes. Stunned, blinded with splashing oil, the man slumped backward. Wingate scrambled up out of the cuddy, and, as the sailor staggered to his feet, landed a fist at the point of the jaw.

"Go on! Jump!" he shouted. "Off of here—get off!"

Groggy, the sailor realized discretion's better part, and made a clumsy leap. He missed the wharf, and splashed in a boiling tangle of foam.

As he came up, grappling for the tender's rail, Wingate found the club and battered the man's clutching fingers. They relaxed. Howling in some incomprehensible tongue,

the sailor plunged again, surged up, and scrabbled at the palmetto logs.

"Go on—beat it!" roared Wingate, now quite reverted to the language of everyday Americans. "Get out of here, or I'll shoot!"

The empty threat carried. The sailor let go his hold of the wharf, turned, and struck out for the shore. Carried by the combing waves, he heaved mightily toward the sands. The water was shoal. Almost at once he found footing, and went wallowing ashore.

"Go on—get away, or I'll fill you full of lead!"

By the vague light Wingate saw a dark something move along the beach, blend with the shadows, and disappear. Laughing, he dropped his club and plunged below once more.

Down in the cuddy it was darker than King Tut's pocket, but Wingate knew the place well. This was his own boat, in which he had cruised thousands of miles through bayous and lagoons, taking side trips from the yacht. He knew where matches were usually kept, on a little shelf forward; and he found a box there. A minute, and he had lighted the second lamp, and was ready for quick action.

The engine lay in a little compartment aft of the cuddy. Wingate stooped down into that space, threw in the self-starter, and got the engine going. Smoothly, beautifully, she purred. He hurried on deck, cast off the painter, took the wheel, and flung in the full speed ahead. As the tender lurched forward, he swung to port just in time to keep her from bashing her nose against the wharf.

The tender scraped, thumped, turned clear, and gathered speed, slitting the rollers in the cove. From the beach Wingate heard a yell.

He turned, and consigned the seaman to the hottest of all possible hot places.

"I only hope he'll stick around here just five minutes!" thought he. "Then he can run to give the alarm, and be damned to him! Five minutes' start is all I want!"

Laughing, he swung the prow toward the cove entrance and drove the swift-speeding tender for the open sea. At full tilt he urged her. There might be shoals, mud flats, sand bars—little he knew or cared. Everything was staked now on just one factor—speed.

As the tender surged out of the cove and

got away from its slight shelter, the full drive of the storm caught her. Buffeted by wind and rain, Wingate crouched at the wheel. Giant fists seemed pounding at him. The motor boat began to leap wildly, with solid black seas combing over. Bravely she headed into the loud turmoil, with all six cylinders doing their prettiest.

Wingate thanked Heaven that he had spared no expense on the craft. Had she failed him now, right soon would all his battle have been ended, all his problems solved!

He cleared the island, then swung north with it on his starboard hand, the vague loom of it just discernible as a low black blot against the first hints of daybreak. The seas now took him on the port bow, and set the little boat dancing like a drunken dervish. Brine dripped and streamed everywhere. It choked and blinded Wingate, but still he held on. The gale snatched the tops off the waves and flung them in mad handfuls. Dim spray cut and stung. Already the cockpit was sloshing in white torrents around his feet. A deafening tumult of tormented waters filled the air; the world became a ravening confusion that clutched to drag him down. Abysses yawned between trundling hills of sea, and ever the inboard-falling crests kept filling the frail craft.

"She'll be foundering soon," Wingate realized.

Somehow, little enough he seemed to care. The exultation of the moment thrilled him, and death held no terrors. Even that would be escape from slavery!

More sober judgment, however, warned him to take no avoidable risks. He put the tender up square into the wind, dived below, and routed a pail and a bit of rope from the engine compartment. Up again, he becketed the wheel, to hold her into the eye of the storm, and then fell to bailing with great energy. The last vestiges of cobwebs were swept from his brain. The blood leaped in his arteries. He felt himself a man, able to fight a man's battle. Drenched, sweating, he labored—and laughed.

Presently the cockpit was fairly empty, and Wingate swung on his course again. His distance at sea was now so great that, in order to make a run for the place where he thought the Voyageur was lying, he could take the waves on his port quarter. The tender shipped little water on this cut,

and quickened speed. Before long the northern end of the island glimmered vaguely in sight, and Wingate began spying as best he could for the cove itself.

He reduced speed with the control at the wheel, and let the tender jog. A few minutes later he made out the cove entrance. Keeping only seaway, he steered in, found calmer water, and presently saw the yacht lying not far from land, bow on to him.

Now he shut off all power, and in silence came drifting down upon the *Voyageur*. No light showed aboard her, nor was there any visible sign that the alarm had been given.

"If nothing breaks in the next five minutes," he realized, with a surge of exultation, "I'll be aboard her, and the fun will begin!"

Nothing broke. His prophecy came true. As it became certain that he would make the yacht, he abandoned the wheel, went forward, and, with the painter in hand, stood alert. The tender, borne forward by long combers, slipped in past the anchor chain. Wingate flung the painter around a bobstay, and made fast. The tender came about, and lay against the yacht's bows—much to the detriment of paint and varnish, but what did trifles matter?

Wingate watched his chance, caught the stay, pulled himself up, and came inboard over the forecastle rail in approved piratical style.

Once there, he crouched to rest and breathe, to spy out the prospect, and to make ready for the next move.

Through the storm clouds, daylight was now plainly beginning to glimmer. Already objects were growing half visible on the gleaming, rain-scoured deck. The beach, too, could be vaguely seen; and as Wingate noted the absence of the dinghy there, he silently laughed.

"Not much to fear from *that* quarter, after all!" he assured himself. "Everything depends on what I'm going to find aboard the yacht."

He perceived, now, that in the stress of getting aboard he had forgotten his club, and that he possessed no weapon. That would never do! He remembered that in the little pilot house a pair of binoculars were always kept, in a leather case with a shoulder-strap. Those binoculars—just the thing!

He crept aft, silently, furtively, as if he

had been a robber, instead of being aboard his own yacht. The continuing drum of the rain stood him in good stead. He entered the pilot house, found the binoculars in their case, and, with the strap swinging like David's sling from a determined fist, silently made his way down the cabin companion.

In the main cabin it was almost pitch dark, for hardly the ghostliest glimmer seeped through the skylight. A cadenced snoring told him that somebody was there—but who? If one of the engineers, or both, no matter. It could not be the third seaman or the cook, for both of them bunked forward. The only real peril lurked in Zanelli or the captain. Were they ashore, or, by ill chance, had one of them passed the night aboard the yacht?

"Well, the only way to find out is to go and see!" Wingate realized.

His heart was beating a trifle fast, but he felt singularly calm, and even elated. The next few moments, he knew, were going to decide many things—perhaps even life or death.

He turned first to the door of the little cabin occupied by Zanelli. With infinite caution he crept to it, tried the knob, turned it, and swung the door. He listened. No sound of breathing! He advanced, groping for the bunk. Empty!

With a gulp of relief he retreated, closing the door. The yacht was cradling in the swell piled into the cove by the storm. Wingate must leave no loose doors to bang, to give the alarm.

"Now, then, for the captain!" thought he, creeping toward Jaccard's room, across the main cabin.

This door was on the hook. A bad sign, that! It almost surely meant that Jaccard was within.

Yes—as Wingate stood listening, he heard a slow, measured breathing. Now, then, for the captain, indeed!

Wingate did not hesitate. His fighting blood was up. No great strength of muscle was his, as yet; but heart and soul were a crusader's. Noiselessly he reached up, slipped the hook free, and carefully lowered it. He opened the door, thanking all the gods that it did not creak. He entered, closed the door, and found himself within three feet of the redoubtable Jaccard.

Just where the electric light was, Wingate well knew. When the yacht's dynamo was idle, storage batteries fed all the

lights. There was sure to be current. He reached for the little chain, twitched it, and flooded the cabin with a brilliant glare.

Right in front of him the captain lay, in rather absurdly striped pyjamas. It seemed ridiculous that a man of his immense strength should wear striped pyjamas—unheroic, somehow, and out of keeping. This inconsequential thought flicked through Wingate's alert brain. He saw, too, the captain's huge, hairy forearm, and the great hand over the edge of the bunk—a hand so large that a silver quarter would pass through Jaccard's finger ring. Against an arm and a hand like those, what could Wingate hope to accomplish?

Suddenly he heard his own voice:

"Get up, you! Wake up!"

"Huh?" grunted the captain, and heaved over in the bunk.

He opened stupid, dazed eyes. Then, as these focused on Wingate—an extraordinary figure in drenched, ink-soaked flannels—they widened with an astonishment so vast that it was almost terror.

Jaccard swung his feet to the floor with a bellow:

"Here, you damned fool! Let me ex—" Wingate struck.

A pair of binoculars at the end of a leather strap makes a very pretty slung shot. Wingate put every ounce of his hate and of his rage into that whirling blow. The binoculars crashed down on Jaccard's skull, just above the right eye; and the captain, for all his bulk and strength, lunged forward, yammering, on both knees.

Smash!

The second blow finished him. He reeled and went flat, knocked out as completely as if he had connected with Jack Dempsey's fist.

For a moment Wingate stood ready with the now irreparably broken binoculars, should any more punishment be needed. None was—none whatever. The two crashes had done for Jaccard, temporarily, yet with entire efficiency.

So far, victory smiled. But what lay still ahead?

Wingate dropped the binoculars and began, in military parlance, to consolidate his position. Before any interference should develop, he had much to do.

First of all he locked the cabin door. Then, turning to the bunk, he hauled off both sheets and tore them into strips about six inches wide. That there was need of

haste was proved by the fact that the snoring of one of the engineers had stopped, and a voice had begun to make unintelligible sounds.

Wingate dragged the captain's feet together and tied them with a good many more strips than were necessary. He hauled the muscular hands side by side, behind Jaccard's back—rolling the limp figure over, not without difficulty—and similarly lashed them. Then he took a few strong hitches between hands and ankles, and presently had the captain hog-tied in a manner that would have baffled anybody less clever than Houdini.

This done, and leaving Jaccard on the floor, he jerked open the captain's desk and table drawers in the most unceremonious manner possible. He found stacks of bills and securities neatly fastened with rubber bands, and jammed them into his coat pockets, so that he bulged with wealth on both sides, more like a buccaneer than a business man.

"Got that back again, by the Lord Harry, eh?" he exulted with a laugh of triumph. "And—hello, what's this?"

"This" was a revolver, the captain's revolver—fully loaded, too. Wingate lost no time in ascertaining that fact. He had hardly assured himself the six-gun carried cartridges, when a loud banging on the door turned him from the desk.

"What the hell's going on in there, anyhow?" demanded an irate voice. "Somebody gone crazy? Captain Jaccard, sir! Hello, captain! Where are you?"

Wingate leveled the revolver at the door.

"Stand back away from that door!" he commanded. "I've got a gun, and I mean business. I'm going to count five, and then shoot through the panel. You've had fair warning!"

He began to count. The sound of scurrying feet died to tense silence.

At five, Wingate let go. The crash of it, in that tiny cabin, was deafening. Through the glossy paneling of the door a splintered hole appeared. The moral effect of that shot, he calculated, exceeded many volumes of argument.

He unlocked the door, flung it open, and walked out, with the gun in his hand. At the far end of the cabin, with the sleep hardly as yet scared out of their eyes, Hazeltine and MacIvor crouched in terror of sudden death. And small wonder! The ink-stained, drenched, bewhiskered figure

that confronted them with blazing eyes of rage, covering them with a revolver, was enough to have put the fear of God into any man. A maniac Wingate looked—no less. His words were rational enough, however.

"Listen, you two!" he flung at them. "You've got your choice of just two things. Obey me, and get paid as men never were paid before. Disobey me, and get killed. This yacht's changed hands. I'm master now. Weigh anchor! Get that engine going! Put the seaman at the wheel! We're going back to Queensport, *now!*"

XII

At dawn, still overcast, but with rain hardly more than a fine misty drizzle, the *Voyageur* plowed into Queensport harbor, swept past grim old Fort Jefferson, and slowed toward the long pier of the Ionic Yacht Club—the pier whence she had sailed on the strangest of her many cruises.

With her tender in tow, she came alongside the pier, eased to the stringpiece, and stopped, as engineer Hazeltine tossed a cable over a mooring pile.

"Go below now, and stay there!" commanded Wingate, from where he stood beside the seaman at the wheel.

"Yes, sir," the engineer replied. "I will, as soon as I get another hawser over, aft. But it ain't right, sir. I tell you I had nothing at all to do with any trouble between you and the captain, sir!"

"No argument, now!" snapped Wingate. "Get that other hawser over, and look sharp! Then go below!" He gestured eloquently with the revolver in his hand. "It's no use for either of you to try to help Jaccard, or to untie him. I'll shoot the first man that sticks a nose out of that companionway! Get a move on, there! Jump!"

When the engineer, grumbling vain pleas of innocence, had vanished below, Wingate turned to the seaman.

"Go up to the clubhouse and tell the manager to phone for a couple of policemen in a hurry. If the manager's asleep, wake him up, and send him to me! Look alive!"

"Yes, sir," replied the seaman, not in the least understanding what it was all about, but too hard-boiled to care much one way or the other. This sort of thing was all in the day's work for him.

He leaped to the wharf and departed at a rolling trot, while Wingate remained

grimly on guard, his watchful eye covering the companionway.

An all but deserted city Queensport seemed, at that pallid hour. Few people were visible, except a handful of negroes shuffling along toward a near-by cotton press, a black man driving a mule cart over the cobbles of Harbor Street, and an aged huckster already wheeling his barrow with the sonorous cry:

"*Raw craib! Raw shrimp! Get yo' shrimpy raw!*"

Wingate gave no heed to anything but the companionway. With his gun ready for business, he stood guard.

If ever any morning dawned on a hard-looking character, it was now. His bare head was all a touse of wet hair. His face was deeply lined with strain and exhaustion. A scraggle of nearly a fortnight's beard gave him the air of a extraordinarily disreputable vagabond. His flannels—soaked, wrinkled, and shrunk, stained with dirt and ink, rain-washed to motley hues—made him a kind of grotesque scarecrow.

But, withal, a healthy color showed in his cheek, so far as there was room for any color to show. His eye was keen, alert, normal. He had become a wholly different man from the cringing, snarling wreck that had sailed—it seemed ages ago—under the lash of morphine addiction—out of Queensport harbor.

The miracle of all miracles had happened. Wingate, not only cured of morphinism, but hating the accursed drug more bitterly than he hated the devil's self, stood there master of his yacht and of himself, once more a *man!*

In a matter of five minutes the sailor came rolling back and swung aboard.

"Police coming?" demanded Wingate.

"I dunno, sir; but the manager, he didn't want to phone for 'em. He give me this here letter for you."

The man extended a sealed envelope.

Wingate took it with mounting anger.

"What the deuce does the man mean by refusing to obey me—me, a club member?" he growled. "What's the idea of writing me a note, when I want the police?"

He thrust the gun into his pocket, ripped open the envelope, and read:

Mrs. Wingate asks you to wait a few minutes before taking action of any kind.

Wingate stared at this, thunderstruck. A score of questions seethed in his brain.

What could it mean? How could his wife know anything of what had happened? Where was she? In Queensport? And if in Queensport, why?

Hard on the heels of all this, a taxi swooped up to the club and a woman got out and ran down the driveway toward the wharf. She wore a little red toque and a raincoat; and if ever a woman looked agitated, it was this one.

"Good God!" cried Wingate, his heart giving a great leap. "Constance! You—here?"

She laughed unsteadily as she reached the wharf. Forgetting all about the companionway, Wingate climbed over the rail, jumped to the stringpiece, and ran to meet her.

"Constance! What's the meaning of all this?"

"Are you all right, Marty? Tell me you're quite all right!"

"I should say I was! But, my Lord, what a time I've had—mutiny, and fighting, and everything! Jaccard, my captain, got me to an island—locked me up—" Wingate grew more or less incoherent. "I broke out—had to fight 'em. I've got the steward marooned—got Jaccard tied up and locked in his cabin. And if I can get the police—"

Constance laughed, a bit wildly.

"God love you, Marty, I knew you would! I knew it!"

"Knew what?" he stammered. "What are you talking about? Where did you come from, and—"

"From the Bella Vista Hotel, right up the street. I've been there a fortnight, waiting—getting a wireless every day—"

"Wireless? But—"

"But nothing came this morning. The last I heard—"

"Good Lord! Are you crazy, or am I?"

"I've been so frightened, Marty—oh, just terribly! I didn't—didn't know but you might have been killed, or something; but the lookout I'd hired, at the club, sighted the Voyageur twenty minutes ago. He phoned the hotel—they woke me up—and here I am!"

Wingate fumbled for words.

"You—you were waiting? But what—"

"Listen, Marty!" She grew suddenly calmer, with a supreme effort. "You may never forgive me, but I don't care. What does that matter? What does anything

matter, but that you're cured? Oh, I can see that, well enough—you cured! And the cost? It's nothing! If I'd spent every dollar I had in the world—"

"Constance! Tell me—"

"I made that all up about Judge Furchgott. I told you a deliberate lie—a wicked lie, to worry and scare you. The will hasn't even come up yet; but I had to scare you, some way! And the letter about that Florida property—I made all that up, too!"

"Scare me?"

"About money—so that you'd realize that you couldn't spend thousands a day, and wreck everything."

"Scare me? My God, what riddles! As if that pirate Jaccard, and that crook Zannelli, hadn't scared me enough! They made me more mad than scared, at that; but oh, the knock-out I gave them! It was a pippin! And what I'll do to them yet!"

Constance had to laugh, though she was pale and her mouth was trembling.

"Poor fellows!" she commiserated.

"They must have had an awful time, going up against you. I'm truly sorry for them!"

"Sorry for them—for a couple of arch crooks? Are you crazy?"

"But I've paid them well. It's cost me heaps and heaps of money; but oh, Lord, how well spent!"

"Will you stop raving and talk sense? I've got to get the police, and—"

"There, there, Marty! It's all right. No police at all, dear. Don't you see? You dear old stupid! That terrible morphine. You never, never would have stopped, so long as anybody was trying to make you—so long as your heart and soul weren't in the battle to stop!"

"But, what the—"

"You had to be made mad by scorn and insults—fighting mad, killing mad. You had to *hate*! Only a whip of scorpions could chase that morphine devil away; but the devil's gone now. I can see that! It's gone forever! Oh, thank God!"

"You mean—you mean to say," stammered Wingate, passing a fight-stained hand over his eyes, as if awaking from a dream, "you mean it—was all a—"

"You haven't really hurt good old Jaccard, have you? A prince, he is. Oh, what a scheming and toiling I had to get him into the plan, and to get you to hire him!

And Zanelli—you haven't injured him? I hope not! They were taking awful chances, Marty, against such a fighter as you are when you're mad enough! Do you know who Zanelli really is? He's Dr. Enrico Spezia, from Rome and London—one of the biggest narcotic specialists in the world. He masqueraded as a steward, to take charge of this case, and—"

Wingate's bearded jaw fell. He stood staring at Constance with blank eyes.

"My Gawd!" muttered the sailor on the yacht's deck. "All these here swell guys is a bunch of nuts. I never seen one yet that wasn't crazy as a bug!"

Wherewith, shaking his head with disapproval, he gnawed a man-size chew from his plug and turned away, disgusted.

Wingate seized his wife's wrist and held it in a grip that hurt; but that hurt, proving his strength, was a joy to her.

"What?" he cried. "A put-up job? A conspiracy?"

She laughed assent; and now with perceptions that for years had been strangers to him, he saw how graceful, how feminine, how infinitely to be desired she was. Old memories and half forgotten intimacies leaped in his heart. He trembled subtly.

"You don't have to forgive me, Marty," she said, her eyes very brave. "You can hate me and cast me off, if you want to. It doesn't matter about me. What matters is you—just *you*! You're well again, all cured and your old self—I thank my God for that!"

There were tears in the steady gray eyes that tried to smile up at him. His own grew wet.

"Yes, I've come back," he said huskily. "It might have killed me, but—"

"I knew that, too. I'd rather it *had* killed you, Marty, than to have had you

live as you were. I'd rather have had you go down fighting than stay a slave! It was the one big chance, the only chance, and I took it."

He laughed grimly.

"I took some chances myself, to get back to you. I tore up a floor, waded a mangrove swamp, smashed a boat, seized a yacht, knocked out a couple of men, and did some shooting; but I got back to you! And *they* didn't do all the curing, either. There was something else—"

"There was *yourself*!"

"Yes, and more than that, Constance. There was this!"

He thrust a hand into his breast pocket and brought out a photograph. Crumpled, rain-soaked, sodden, and discolored with ink, it was a mere wreck and mockery of a photograph. He held it out to her.

"This!" he repeated. "And look at the poor thing now!"

She laughed—her happiest laugh in years.

"Just as it is, Marty," she told him, "that bit of paper is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen!"

"Not the most beautiful thing *I've* ever seen! How about the original? But"—his voice held a warning—"you know what you've been guilty of?"

"Loving you, Martin—loving you enough to risk everything on one throw of the dice!"

"More than that—conspiracy! Conspiracy on the high seas! And do you know what the penalty's going to be?"

"Banishment?"

"No—imprisonment for life!"

"Where, Marty?"

His arm went around her.

"Here, girl!" he answered, as he drew her close.

THE END

AGAIN IT'S APRIL

AGAIN it's April, and we sing
Of leaf and lane and love,
The white road underneath our feet,
And the white moon above.

Again the drift of scented winds,
Birds flying from the south,
Blossoms entwined with Lydia's hair,
And songs upon her mouth!

Charles Divine

The Blue Destroyer

A CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF A KING AND QUEEN OF THE AIR

By Charles G. D. Roberts

AT that far height, although the sun shone blindingly from the rain-purged April blue, the air carried a sharp and tonic chill. There was a draft of wind drawing up slow and steady from the southeast, and it hummed tensely in the stiff-set edges of the great blue goshawk's wings. Without a wing beat, without an effort, he sailed and sailed, and watched, far down, as in a shallow, painted cup, the world of light green meadows and dark green fir woods and the silver-violet coils of a winding river.

Away over to the west, so distant that to eyes less keen than his she would have been invisible, he marked the soaring of his fierce and graceful mate, quartering her own range of sky and earth. They hunted separately, for there was not room on one range for two such implacable destroyers as the goshawk pair.

Not in a vast, slow-mounting spiral, like his giant cousin the eagle, did the blue hawk soar. Rather would he sail straight onward, for perhaps a mile or more, his long wings apparently quite motionless, deriving his impetus from the steady streaming of the wind against the subtly adjusting webs of his strong wing feathers. At last, with a wide, majestic swing, tilting almost imperceptibly, he would turn and sail back to his unmarked starting point in the viewless air. Then, lowering his lean head a little, and slightly dropping the rigid fan of his spread tail feathers, he would glide downward on a long, gradual slant, at such tremendous speed that the wind hissed in his pinions.

He was not hungry at the moment, and there were as yet no clamorous young in the great, untidy nest in the top of the old birch tree on the hillside; so his gem-bright eyes, hard as crystal, as they swept the colored earth and flawless air, sought only

such alluring prey as might tempt his glutted appetite or arouse him to the murderous excitement of the chase. Earth and air alike seeming empty of aught to spur his effort, he checked his descent and mounted again to his lonely heights, fiercely rejoicing in his unchallenged strength and speed, his fine veins pulsing scarlet with all the thrill and promise of the spring.

Suddenly, in the sparkling blue distance, he saw the soaring form of his mate narrow her wings and drop earthward, to strike some quarry to him invisible. Well he knew that unerring, arrowy plunge and stroke. Confident that she would secure a prize worthy of her skill, he now sailed leisurely toward the nest, to meet her there and make ardent display of his pride in her swift prowess. For this was the season of the renewing of their loves, and he knew that unless she chanced to be driven by hunger—which was not probable—she would be sure to bring her prey home to show it to him.

Mated for life, and devoted comrades the whole year through, with each recurring springtime the two hawks lived over again their first aerial honeymoon, and courted, wooed, and loved with ardors ever new. At enmity with all the world and engrossed in each other, their tumultuous love embraces all took place awing, as they breasted the winds far up in the impregnable solitudes of the sky.

If the great blue hawk had not been so intent upon his mate and her unseen kill, his piercing eye would have noted sooner the straight, bullet-swift flight of a wild duck which crossed far below him, beating northward toward a sedge lake that glimmered in the distance. As has been said, he was not hungry; but now he was emulous to match his mate's kill, and the duck was a quarry worth his pursuing. The

murder lust thrilled in his veins. Half closing his long pinions, he dipped and shot downward, dropping like a wedge of steel at incredible speed.

The duck, flying with outstretched neck and rapid strokes of her short and immensely powerful wings, was already far ahead, and was traveling at a pace that few of the voyagers of the air could hope to rival. She had caught sight of that shape of doom, her deadliest terror, sailing high between her and the sun. She redoubled her effort till her heart was near bursting and the wind whistled sharply from her throbbing wing beats. Flying at nearly eighty miles an hour, she was a good half mile in advance of her enemy when he had dropped to her level.

And now, in direct pursuit of his splendid quarry, the great hawk no longer sailed majestically, but rushed through the rent air with tremendous surging thrusts of his shortened wings. He drew up on the fugitive so swiftly that the wild duck, for all her desperate speed, seemed hardly to be moving.

She had one hope, one slenderest chance, however. Just below her there opened out suddenly, through a rift in the fir woods, the gleam of a deep forest pool. There, could she reach it, would be safety. Like a bolt she shot down toward it, almost overbalancing in the unaccustomed steepness of her descent.

The green world rose to meet her. Her wings screamed thinly past the tree tops. Then the blue death hissed down over her, talons of steel clutched her neck like a vise, her beak opened wide, and her life went out in one strangled squawk of horror.

The impetus of that terrific rush carried the hawk and his prey almost down to the water. Then the spread of his wings turned him and lifted him steeply, and two or three mighty buffets bore him once more above the tree tops. Flapping heavily now, for the dangling prize was no light burden even for such wings as his, he flew straight home to the nest.

There he found his mate awaiting him, standing erect and majestic, with one talon gripping the limp, furry form of a young rabbit. Alighting beside her, he deposited his prize at her feet, as a love offering. Then, after a slight pause, as it was obvious that she had no need of the gift, he fell to devouring it himself; and the two banqueted together in high content.

The nest, a rough but substantial structure of sticks lined with dry grass, was fixed securely in a crotch, where a large branch jutted out from the trunk of the old birch tree, at a height of some thirty odd feet from the ground. At this date it contained only two eggs, of a pale greenish tint. The female had yet two more to lay before she would settle down to her arduous task of brooding.

In appearance the splendid pair of mated marauders were practically identical, except that the female was the larger and somewhat the more massively built. From her fiercely curved slaty blue beak to the tip of her tail she was a good two feet in length, while her mate was about two inches shorter, and of a more rakishly piratical slenderness.

Both were to the last degree elegant, cruel, self-assured, and dauntless in bearing. Their piercingly bright, hard eyes, staring calm defiance to all the world of air, gained an added ferocity from a thin line of white feathers arching over them, contrasting sharply with the dark gray-blue of their broad, arched skulls. All the upper parts of their bodies, wings, and tails, except for a narrow edging of white at the tip, were of this slaty blue, while beneath they were all white and pale gray in irregular lines. Their long, sharp talons, deadly in their clutching and rending strength, were of a dull yellow, in trim contrast to their plumage.

II

In the stimulating, changeful spring of New Brunswick, with game abundant, the weeks passed uneventfully for the great blue hawks, till the time came when there were four voracious little ones in the nest, and hunting became no longer a pastime but an exacting task. No more did the great blue marauders pick and choose their victims for the richness of the prize or for the savage pleasure of the chase. They took what came their way, so long as it was alive and wholesome—for none of their noble line would stoop to carrion, even in direst need. Such humble prey as rats and mice were not despised, and all kinds of small birds were snatched up greedily in passing. Such morsels, of course, were not worth carrying home to the nest, but they served to assuage the voracious appetites of the parent hawks while hunting bigger game.

Leaving to his mate the richer hunting grounds, and those nearest home, the blue destroyer flew further afield. He displayed an audacity which, in a less majestic and self-possessed bird, would have seemed like impertinence.

One day a long-legged farm boy was hunting for a snipe's nest in the alder-dotted cow pasture, while the excited mother snipe fluttered in the air close before him, trying to lead him away from the spot where her precious eggs were hidden. There was a sudden hissing of wings, a great wing tip almost brushed the boy's face, and he looked up, startled, to see the little brown mother swept off, crushed lifeless in the hawk's talons. He cursed the slayer indignantly, forgot about the nest he was looking for, and went back to the farmhouse to load his gun with a heavy charge of duck shot.

"That damned varmint 'll be after our chickens next," he muttered. "I'll be ready for him!"

It is to be noticed that the boy's prophecy fell into two separate parts. As to the first, he was speedily proved a true prophet; but not so as to the second.

About mid morning of the very next day, as he was crossing the farmyard from the barn to the kitchen with a basket half full of new-laid eggs, he paused for a moment to admire a little black hen with a huge white topknot, who was dusting herself luxuriously in the ash heap. She was an indefatigable layer, and the boy, who made a hobby of the poultry, took a particular pride in her as being the only specimen of her breed—the white-crested black Polish—in all the countryside. All her eggs, which were small and pure white, he saved for setting; and he hoped to get a rather distinguished cross, the rest of his flock being Rhode Island reds.

The little black hen sprang up and shook a shower of ashes from her feathers. As she did so, a blue thunderbolt fell upon her, and she was hidden under a confusion of beating wings.

With a roar of rage the boy dropped his basket of eggs—*smash*—and leaped to the rescue. At the same moment, from the other side of the ash heap, the red cock dashed forward in a fury to hurl himself upon the slayer; but both were just too late. Already the great hawk was a dozen feet in air, his victim dangling pathetically from his talons.

With language incredible in one so young, even though he had been trained in the lumber camps, the boy rushed into the kitchen for his gun. When he reappeared with it, the robber had vanished behind the tops of the fir trees that fenced the farmyard on its eastern side. The rest of the hens had scurried into hiding. Only the cock remained, crowing vain defiance.

The boy raced through the grove and saw the enemy already out of range, flapping away serenely. He fired, nevertheless, as a relief to his feelings, and then, with his lips set grimly, returned to the house.

His mother stood in the kitchen door, wiping floury hands on her apron.

"Didn't git that hawk!" she remarked crisply.

"Nope!" snapped the boy, depositing the gun behind the door with a bang.

"I thought ye said ye could shoot!" she continued.

"Out o' range," grunted the boy.

"Then what did ye fire for?" went on the good lady inexorably.

The boy opened his mouth, then snapped it shut again firmly, and went out to clean up the wreckage of the egg basket. He knew that his mother would have the last word in an argument, anyhow; and it wasn't her hen.

As it chanced, however, the boy's shot had not been quite so futile as he imagined. The shattering report of the heavy duck gun had startled even the blue destroyer's self-assured poise, and a stray pellet of the scattered charge had stingingly nicked a feather from his wing. He drew the conclusion that this particular farmyard was a dangerous one to trifle with, and carried his marauding further afield. His responsibility to the hungry nestlings at home taught him a prudence which at other times was foreign to his insolently audacious spirit.

While yet the black and white feathers of the unfortunate little hen were scattered thickly about the nest, the great hawk, seeing his mate draw near with a young rabbit in her claws, sprang into the air in pursuit of nobler quarry. He had marked a wide-winged heron flapping heavily above the sunlit grass of the water meadows which stretched, far off toward the southern end of the valley, along the banks of the slow-winding stream. Swooping from his perch beside the nest, he darted in pursuit, flying

low and straight, with short, vehement wing thrusts.

The heron, an immense, lanky bird of a bluish gray color, with legs like stilts, a long, snakelike neck, a narrow, wedge-shaped head, and a golden dagger of a bill, seemed unaware of the onswEEPing foe behind him, and did not hasten his leisurely progress by a single wing beat; but he sank lower and lower, till he was just skimming the grass tops. Then, suddenly, when his dread pursuer was within about fifty feet of him, and perhaps twenty feet higher in the air, he dropped his legs, snapped around, and stood motionless to face the attack. His neck was coiled back between his humped shoulders like a spring, that formidable yellow dagger was pointing upward, and his hard, bright eyes were wide and menacing.

The great hawk stooped, shot down with a hiss of wings, and struck; but, wise just in time, he struck short, and so avoided, but only by a hairbreadth, the long, lightning thrust of that golden dagger. Knowing the heron's method of fighting and the deadly efficiency of his weapon, the hawk had calculated on this dangerous counterstroke. Instantly flashing about, he struck again, thinking to catch his antagonist before he could recover guard; but he did not know the experienced craft of this particular heron, who had fought hawks before and knew their tactics.

The wily spearer of frogs and fish and water rats had not been so rash as to launch his full thrust. He had recovered his guard even in the fraction of a second while his enemy turned; and the hawk's second strike was met by a thrust which, had it reached its aim, would have ended the blue destroyer's career ignominiously. Realizing his error, however, the hawk sideslipped miraculously, and escaped with no more serious hurt than a long, frowning gash up and across one thigh.

The shock almost overturned him. He whirled, and in a fury swooped again to the attack; but he saw his pale feathers floating in the air. He saw the golden dagger once more on guard, its tip red with his blood. The scalding anguish in his thigh recalled him to discretion. He swerved upward, circled twice or thrice above his intended victim's head—at a safe distance—and then sailed away to the nearest woods, to perch for a while in a dark fir tree and digest his discomfiture.

For several days after this humiliating rebuff the great hawk was peculiarly savage. After he had glutted his own hunger, he recklessly slaughtered birds too small to be worth carrying to the nest. He could not come home with a tiny thrush or sparrow in his talons and incur the scorn of his redoubtable mate, though such small fry served very well to make a meal on while waiting for bigger game.

Encountering a brood of half-grown ducklings, with their mother, in a remote farmyard, with no one to champion them but a lazy old cat who watched the tragedy with indifference from the kitchen window sill, he slew them all in a frenzy of vindictiveness. Then he devoured two of them and tore off the heads of all the others, before carrying away the body of the mother to his nestlings.

When the pain in his thigh subsided, however, his bad temper subsided with it, and, remembering that game was none too abundant for the needs of his hungry family, he decided to desist from such wasteful slaughter.

But he did not feel quite reinstated in his arrogance until one day when he succeeded in avenging himself on the heron tribe. It was just after sunset, and black against the red of the western sky he marked the long, angular silhouette of a heron beating homeward to its nesting place. It was flying high, and he knew that he could overtake it before it could make a landing and meet his attack on fair terms.

He shot aloft in a cold rage, passed below it to intercept its descent, flashed past its darting bill with a bewildering buffet of stiff wing tips, shot above it with a nimbleness of wing which its heavy flight could not swerve to meet, and struck it unerringly at the base of the snakelike neck. The grip of his inexorable talons squeezed out its life in a few seconds, and exultantly he started homeward with the sprawling prize.

But the weight of the victim was too much for even such wing power as that of the great blue hawk. Flapping with all his strength, he nevertheless sank lower and lower, till at last, nearly spent, he landed in the top of a towering pine about half a mile from the nest. Here he deposited his prize securely in a crotch.

After a brief rest, he flew home to summon his mate. Side by side they feasted triumphantly, till the stripped and partially dismembered carcass was no longer too

heavy to be carried. Then, his complacency quite restored, the victor snatched up the diminished burden and flew home to feed his nestlings, while his mate soared off to resume her own hunting.

III

HAVING no foe to fear but man, and half scornful of even man in their arrogant aloofness, the devoted pair of marauders kept on their career of destruction as the weeks slipped by, the cool northern spring blossomed into glowing summer, and the well fed but ever hungry nestlings grew toward full feather. Then, as if the unseen powers of the wild had grown impatient at sight of this too confident good fortune, they averted their faces for a moment—and disaster fell.

The blue destroyer was hawking low through the glades of a sparsely wooded slope near the river bank. He was chasing—with an intense and savage glee, and with dartings as nimble and sharp as those of his fierce little cousin, the sparrowhawk—a bird no bigger than a thrush, but as bloodthirsty a destroyer, in its tiny way, as the terrible blue hawk himself. It was a shriek, or butcher bird—a creature so agile of wing, so cunning in its hairbreadth evasions, as to call forth its pursuer's utmost powers.

The great hawk was highly enjoying the chase. He was on the point of triumph. His talons were just unclosing and reaching to grip the prey, when from somewhere out of sight beyond a screen of leafage there came a crashing report.

A searing anguish stabbed through one of the destroyer's wings. He turned clean over in the air with the violence of his flight, bulleted onward, and came down heavily to earth, while his breathless quarry darted off into hiding.

Dazed, but dauntless and defiant even in the face of such a catastrophe as this, the great hawk picked himself up and strove to rise once more into the air; but only one wing answered to his will. The other gave an agonizing flop, and he rolled over ignominiously on his side.

Again he picked himself up, his heart bursting with rage and a sudden sense of impotence. Bracing himself erect, balanced by stiff tail and one outstretched wing, he glared about him, prepared to do battle to the end against the unseen adversary who had struck him down; but no ad-

versary appeared. The stroke of fate had been a blind one.

It happened that the boy of the farm, the destroyer's old foe, passing down a neighboring glade with his gun, had fired at an owl which he suspected, not unjustly, of raids upon his chicken roost. He had brought down the owl—one of those big horned marauders which wreak such slaughter in the barnyards—and had carried off the prize in triumph, to be stuffed and mounted. He little guessed that a stray shot—a heavy pellet designed for long-range shooting at duck and goose—had pierced the dense tangles of leafage and had accidentally found its mark in an ancient enemy.

For a long time—the creatures of the wild are capable of an infinite patience—the blue hawk sat there motionless, showing no sign of the burning agony in his wing, except for an occasional flinching of his arrogant glass-bright eyes. At last, concluding that the invisible foe had passed on, and that no further attack was imminent, he decided that his present position, in the open glade, was not a sound one strategically. With painful effort, and trailing his disabled wing on the ground, he hopped awkwardly to the roots of an immense pine tree, and placed himself with his back to the giant bole, where he could feel himself protected from the rear and could command all approaches from the front or either side.

For a long time nothing happened. A big woodpecker flew across the glade, unconscious of the savage eyes that followed it impotently. Once or twice a rabbit came hopping up, gazed with mild curiosity at the immobile figure beneath the tree, and then darted away in panic as it realized that it was face to face with one of its deadliest foes.

At last the great hawk began to feel hungry. The digestion of all the hawks is swift and fierce. Their hearts send a thin, bright scarlet stream of blood through their tough arteries at tremendous speed, and all their life processes function at high pressure. Forgetting his stoical dignity, the wounded destroyer opened his beak and uttered a succession of shrill cries, rather small and querulous to come from the throat of so formidable a bird. He knew that the sound might bring enemies upon him, but that he was ready enough to risk. He was calling for his mate.

His mate, meanwhile, had grown anxious over his long absence from the nest. Again and again she had scanned the skies for him. Three hunting trips—brief and hurried, but successful as far as small game went—had she made since his last departure from the nest. The hungry nestlings were demanding more than she had brought them.

At last, oppressed with premonitions of disaster, she sailed away low above the tree tops, and went quartering all the area of the male goshawk's accustomed range, her keen eyes searching every copse and glade for some sign of him.

It was just about this time that the destroyer's stoicism had given way, and he had sent out his appeal for help. His mate, at the moment, was far out of hearing; but the shrill call reached the ears of a big ginger-colored cat—an ordinary house cat who had forsaken the homes of men and taken to the wilds. She had become a savage and cunning hunter, but in some respects she still lacked woodcraft. She was unacquainted with the various and usually misleading voices of the hawk tribe. The cries she had heard seemed to her ears the utterance of some feeble creature in distress—an easy prey, no doubt. Her belly to the earth, her eyes round and cold as a lynx's, she crept noiselessly toward the sound.

When, rounding the trunk of the big pine tree, she came face to face with her intended prey, and met the hard glare of those arrogant eyes, she was somewhat taken aback. Noting the powerful hooked beak and the long, clutching talons, she stopped in her tracks and crouched, her tail twitching, her eyes narrowed, her ears flattened back upon her skull.

This was not the easy victim she had expected. She could see no sign of discomposure in the hawk's fixed regard; but she soon observed that he was wounded—that one wing drooped helplessly. This restored her confidence, and with a little darting run she pounced.

Unerringly she reached her aim; but she was met by a set of talons that clutched her whole face, and stabbed into it mercilessly, and held fast, while that rending beak bit one of her forepaws to the bone. Her weight and the force of her spring bore the hawk over backward, but he held on like a bulldog.

With a wowl of pain and surprise she tore

herself free, lacerated and bleeding, and sprang back out of reach of this strange antagonist. The hawk, badly ruffled and deeply scratched, but otherwise not much the worse for the encounter, flopped to his feet and resumed his attitude of defense. A few pale feathers, spotted with blood, strewed the turf around him.

The cat was much more gravely wounded than her adversary, but she was game, and her blood was up. She had learned prudence, however. She crouched flat, planning a less headlong method of attack. Presently she crept forward, step by step, wary now and thrice more dangerous, and circled slyly, with the object of catching her opponent on the disabled wing. The hawk shifted to face her, and once more, though undaunted, he sent forth his querulous call for help.

This time his mate was near enough to hear the call. Swooping soundlessly through the lower branches of the pine tree, she saw and understood what was happening. She made no reply, but just as the cat rushed in once more to the attack, she dropped upon its back, gripping it by the neck and loins.

That strangling grip went through fur and hide and muscle, the steel-sharp points of the hawk's talons piercing to the cat's vitals. Madly the feline fought, writhing in the effort to get teeth and claws into her assailant; but she was at a hopeless disadvantage. The wide wings flapping above her were not powerful enough to raise her into the air, but they so lifted her that only her hind paws touched the ground, and she could secure no foothold from which to struggle.

Then the wounded hawk made one hop forward, trailing his wing, seized the enemy's hind legs in a clutch of iron, sank his beak deep into her back, just above the root of her tail, and bit her backbone clean through. This ended the fight.

IV

BOTH hawks were hungry. Without waiting for the body of their slain adversary to stop quivering, they fell to their meal. Having feasted together they held converse for a few moments, in some subtle, silent way which evades human observation, till the female clearly understood the predicament of her mate. Then she dragged the torn carcass close against the foot of the tree, saw her mate mount guard

upon it, and flew off to attend to her duties at the nest.

Just before sunset she returned to him again, alighting close beside him, and assuring herself that he had plenty of food; but she left him after a few seconds, for she knew that the youngsters in the nest were needing her.

As night settled down upon the glade, the blue destroyer, erect against the base of the tree, grew doubly watchful. It can truthfully be said that his indomitable spirit was not terrified; but he knew that his situation was perilous to the last degree. He knew that the hour of the night prowlers, hungry and implacable, was approaching. If a lynx or a fox should come that way, all his courage would be of little avail. Any of the lesser prowlers, however, he knew that he could fight with a good chance of success.

Immobile as the trunk behind him, and fairly invisible against it, he faced the darkness with all his senses matchlessly alert. Sleep was very far from his vigilant eyes.

Presently the moon rose, pale honey-colored in the cloudless sky, and flooded the glade before him with clear, cold light, while he himself, to his infinite relief, remained in deep shadow.

By and by four rabbits came hopping into the moonlight. For nearly an hour they gamboled there, frolicking like children, never dreaming of the keen eyes that followed their every movement. Then, suddenly, one of them thumped loudly upon the turf with his strong hind feet, and at the signal they all scattered in a panic, and vanished.

A second later a snaky brown weasel, his murderous little eyes like drops of flame where the light caught them, darted into the glade, raced across it, and disappeared, hot on the trail of one of the rabbits. The eyes of the great hawk emitted a spark of hate. He loathed weasels. They were very dangerous to fight, and their rank, stringy flesh was very little good to eat.

Later in the night a big brown owl, on wings as soundless as sleep, sailed low through the glade, hunting for wood mice. Her all-seeing eyes detected the great hawk against the pine trunk, and glared upon him coldly. She was puzzled to see him on the ground, which was no place for a hawk; but she had no wish to try conclusions with him, and winnowed off in some

haste. If there were any wood mice in that glade, he was welcome to them.

At last the perilous night wore away, the chill gray of dawn crept through the leafage, a twitter of small awaking birds sounded in bush and tree top, and the giant hawk, shifting his feet, stretched his unwounded wing with relief and made his toilet.

With the first rosy flush of sunrise came his mate, with a plover in her claws, and alighted beside him. Seeing that he still had plenty of food left, she dropped the plover on one side, and the pair breakfasted together on the remains of the misguided cat. Then she picked up the plover and sailed off with it to the still hungry nestlings. Her mate's necessities had been her first thought when sunrise came to the lofty nest, because she knew the peril that the night had meant for him.

Throughout the next five days she came at least three times daily to the spot where her mate held his dangerous vigil at the foot of the pine tree. She kept him well fed, and she kept the voracious nestlings well fed, but she herself was half starved in the struggle. She grew gaunt, and her trim, glossy plumage lost much of its luster and smoothness.

Meanwhile, thanks to his clean blood and abounding vitality, the blue destroyer's wound was swiftly mending. The shot had broken no bones, but merely torn the great main muscle which controlled the wing. The ragged edges reunited. Presently, with painful and awkward effort, he succeeded in flopping up to the lowest branch of his tree, and then he felt secure. He was able to sleep the night through without that wearing vigilance.

Here he kept quiet for three days more, while his devoted mate grew ever leaner and more disheveled. Then he achieved a slow flight around the tree; and toward sunset of the day following, his mate beside him, he winged triumphantly back to the nest.

Two or three days later he was hunting again with all his old dash and relentless ferocity, harrying the partridge coveys, the broods of wild ducks, the half grown chickens that strayed in the pastures about the remote farms of the settlement. He fed the big, greedy nestlings, he fed himself, and for many days he fed his devoted mate as well, while she took her ease beside the nest and recovered her strength and beauty.

Uneasy Money

HOW TWO ARTISTS SETTLED A BET, WITH SOME QUITE
UNEXPECTED RESULTS

By K. R. G. Browne

WITHOUT a doubt, the pavement artist had chosen his position with an eye to its strategic value. He sat beneath a high wall at a corner where two roads came together at an acute angle, so that persons heedlessly rounding the bend from one direction tripped over his foot, while those advancing from the other tripped over one of his canvases. Thus the attention of the wayfarer was arrested, and presumably the exchequer of the strategist was enriched. When you have tripped over a man's leg—and that, moreover, the only leg he has—you cannot well affect complete ignorance of his existence; nor, in the circumstances, can you give him less than a sixpence.

Such, at any rate, was the thought that came to me as I turned the corner and trod heavily upon the artist's foot. He uttered a sharp yelp and withdrew his leg in haste.

"Confound it!" he said.

"I beg your pardon," I apologized.

"They all do it," he said irritably—though, having regard to the facts above-mentioned, his irritation may well have been assumed.

Studying him, while I fumblingly sought to discover if anything smaller than half a crown inhabited my pocket, I perceived that this was a pavement artist of uncommon quality. He was a short, powerfully built man of middle age, having an enviable quantity of black hair and a truculent little beard of the same color. His eyes were very dark and fierce, and a great imperious beak of a nose heightened the natural aggressiveness of his expression.

Though he lacked a leg, he impressed me as a man who might prove very useful in an emergency. His garments, though of palpable antiquity, were serviceable enough. The hat which lay, mouth up-

ward, at his side was certainly shapeless and green with age; but then so is mine, for I prefer them that way.

Into this hat, my researches having yielded nothing less, I now dropped a florin, in the careless manner of one having large ideas on the subject of alms.

"Ha!" said the pavement artist. "Two bob!"

He promptly thrust a hand into his pocket, withdrew it, and offered me a shilling and sixpence.

"What's this?" I asked.

"Your change," said he. "A man who gives two bob to a pavement artist is either drunk or short of change. You're not drunk, so here you are; and thank you, sir!"

"Nonsense!" I said, aware that I was blushing. "It was nothing of the—"

"Take it!" snapped the pavement artist.

I took it, for—as I hope I have made clear—he was that kind of man.

There followed a pause, for this singular person interested me, and life nowadays is not so crammed with interest that one can afford to shun a new experience. I cast an appraising glance at his exhibits, and my interest increased.

Six canvases stood in an orderly rank against the wall. Large paintings they were, executed in oils. Each was a landscape, and though I know rather less of art than a Zulu knows of hydrostatics, even to me it was evident that here was craftsmanship of high caliber. These six pictures, with their trees and flowers and streams and dim blue mountains, made the little suburban street seem very lifeless and unreal.

"Like 'em?" asked the pavement artist, as if he did not in the least care whether I liked them or not.

"Very much," I assured him.

"You're the second!" said he. "An old lady yesterday said they were very pretty."

"Are they—" I began, and hesitated. "I mean, did you—"

The fierce eye of the one-legged man withered me.

"Because you give me sixpence," he said coldly, "that does not buy you the privilege of insulting me." He pointed to a legend, boldly inscribed in chalk upon the pavement:

ALL MY OWN WORK

"Quite so!" I said hurriedly. "Quite so! I never thought—it just occurred to me—you see, you've not conformed to the traditions of pavement artistry. Where, for example, is the chunk of salmon? Where is the lighthouse in a storm? Where is the portrait of Lord Haig? Where is the—"

"Right!" said the pavement artist briskly. "Stand still!"

From his pocket he took a piece of chalk, and with it he drew half a dozen bold lines upon the ground at his side. When he had done, there upon the pavement was my face—my face as it appears to me in those black moods, such as occasionally attack the vainest among us, when I hate my face and everything about me. It was a caricature—a gross and libelous exaggeration, I hope; but an unmistakable likeness and a brilliant piece of work.

"I see!" I said feebly, marveling that a man who could do such a thing could find only the pavement to do it on. "I—I apologize for my unworthy—"

"Don't mention it," returned the pavement artist, obliterating me with a sweep of his hand. "You're not the first—hello, Rags, you're late!"

"You'd be late yourself, father," said a voice over my shoulder, "if you had to carry this little lot!"

II

I TURNED, and almost collided with a girl who had approached us unobserved. As I drew back, mumbling apologies, I was conscious of a slight sensation of dizziness, for I had never seen a girl like this before. I have no skill in describing feminine beauty, so it must suffice to say that she was quite the most perfect thing I had ever encountered in a fairly wide experience. She was a small person—large women affect me as much as a snake affects a rabbit

—and her hair and eyes were dark, and everything that hair and eyes should be. She also had a wholly adorable nose and a notably resolute chin. She was very neatly and very plainly dressed, and she carried an extraordinary number of parcels. From one of them, as I gaped at her, an onion escaped and leaped blithely to the ground.

"Oh, dash it!" she said. "Thanks, so much!" This to me, as I hastened to retrieve the errant vegetable. "I've lost three and a potato already. Had a good day, father?"

"One and ninepence and a ten-centime piece," replied the pavement artist cheerfully. "It may not keep the wolf from the door, but it ought to confine him to the hall." He seized a crutch that lay beside him and hoisted himself upright. "I want my tea, Rags!"

"So do I," said the girl. "How am I going to carry your pictures and the week-end provender as well?"

At this point I coughed. I am not much of an opportunist, but it seemed to me that here was such a chance as comes my way but seldom. If I was unwilling to part from the pavement artist until I knew more about that peculiar man, I was still more reluctant to lose sight of his daughter.

"Perhaps," I offered, "I might help, if you'd allow me."

"There speaks a Samaritan," said the one-legged man. "You carry the Academy, then. We've not far to go."

Nor had we. Across the road we went—I with the pictures, the girl with her parcels, the pavement artist surprisingly nimble upon his crutch—down a side street, and so came presently to a large mews, where shirt-sleeved men were valeting motor cars. The pavement artist produced a key and opened a door.

"Had any tea?" he asked.

"No," I confessed.

"There's only bread and jam, father," said his daughter.

"What more does he want?" demanded the one-legged man, and turned to me. "Our loaf is at your service, sir. This way!"

With remarkable agility he set off up a steep, narrow stair, we following.

Anon I found myself in a small white-washed room, which at first sight appeared to contain nothing but pictures. Pictures were everywhere—on the walls, on the floor, stacked in corners—large pictures,

small pictures, pictures in every stage of completion.

Gradually I noted other furnishings—not much, but all good—an oak table, some rush-bottomed chairs, and a Queen Anne bureau of walnut.

"Chuck 'em down anywhere," said the pavement artist, "and take a pew. By the way, my name is Smith. This is my daughter—a shrewish vixen, but she makes a heavenly omelette. Her name is Vivien, but I call her Rags, for no reason that I know of."

"Mine," I returned, "is Peter Traill, and I'm a journalist by trade—at least, I write a lot and sell a little."

"A degrading profession, I've always thought," commented Mr. Smith amiably. "However, every man to his taste. Tea, wench, and speedily."

"As time goes on, Mr. Traill," said Vivien from the doorway, "you'll understand this peculiar old gentleman better. He's one of those unfortunate people who must talk or burst. He even nags himself in his sleep, just to keep his eye in."

"Tea, Rags!" thundered her parent.

That was a curious meal. As Vivien had foretold, there was nothing but bread and jam; but what of that? It is not what you eat, but what you talk about, that makes a meal, and we talked of everything under the moon. That is to say, the pavement artist talked, Vivien and I saying "Really?" as required.

The one-legged man appeared to have been everywhere, done everything, met everybody. In one short hour he talked his way around the world and back again, but in so dispassionate and impersonal a fashion that when he had done I still knew nothing of his history or of the reasons that condemned him to live by exhibiting works of art to a public which rewarded him at the rate of one shilling and ninepence a day.

When at last, fearful of outstaying my welcome, I rose and made motions of departure, I ventured on a final effort to extract information on these points.

"It must be an anxious business," I suggested casually, "to sit on the street all day and wait for somebody to recognize merit."

Mr. Smith cocked an eye at me—an eye which said very plainly that to him my mind was as an open book, printed in large, clear type.

"Why, no," he answered. "There's always something going on; and people are really very lavish, considering income tax. I've only been on this pitch three days, but already I've taken ten bob—one and ninepence to-day, four and fourpence yesterday, and three and elevenpence the day before. Are you going? Well, come again."

I looked at Vivien.

"Please do," she said. "It's so good for father to have somebody to talk at, through, and over. He wore me out long ago. There's usually bread and jam."

"Then I'll certainly come," said I, reaching for my hat.

III

As I made my way out of the mews, an idea which for some time had been simmering in my mind suddenly crystallized to a decision. I did not immediately lay a course for my rooms, but boarded an omnibus and was carried southward to the affluent and haughty district of Belgravia, where my uncle lives in an atmosphere of high art and great wealth.

Men say of Uncle Ferdinand that on his demise he will infallibly be stuffed and placed tenderly under glass in a public museum, for he is that rarest of all created things—a rich artist who has attained riches solely by his art, and whose art, nevertheless, has not declined in the process. Uncle Ferdinand is a very great painter indeed. In academic circles he is little less than a god, while even the art critics of Sunday newspapers listen when he speaks—than which there is no greater tribute. He paints but little nowadays, being well on in years and opulent beyond his needs; but he remains a power, and is aware of it.

I found Uncle Ferdinand in his library, reading Rabelais through horn-rimmed spectacles. He is a gray-haired gentleman of eighteenth-century appearance, having rather the air of one skilled in the nice management of a fancy cane than that of an unusually astute business man. At my respectful entrance he looked up and nodded genially.

"Ah, Peter! Come in, my boy! Whisky in the cupboard."

"No, thanks, uncle," said I. "I've dropped in because I've run across a fellow I think you'd like to meet."

"Good!" exclaimed my uncle. "I love meeting people. Who and what is he?"

"His name is Smith, and he's a pavement artist."

My uncle sat up sharply in his chair.

"A pavement artist? Peter, you interest me. Say on!"

So, briefly but adequately, I described the circumstances of my meeting with the one-legged man. I spoke of his arresting personality, set forth my opinion of his work, and expressed my regret that one so gifted should be doomed to live so meagerly. I employed, I fancy, considerable eloquence, and my audience heard me out in an attentive silence.

"H-m!" observed Uncle Ferdinand, taking snuff. "You mentioned a daughter."

I had, but as shortly as possible.

"She must," mused Uncle Ferdinand in his detached way, "be an unusually attractive young person. Enthusiasm is not normally one of your vices, Peter."

"It 'll be one of yours," I assured him, "when you see this man's work. Honestly, it's great stuff! I want you to come and look at it."

"I think I shall," said Uncle Ferdinand, "in my own good time. Where did you say he is to be found? Ah, yes—one of those localities where they dine with the blinds up. He might have chosen more wisely. Now tell me all about yourself, my boy."

Presently, having told him all about myself, I withdrew from the presence, conscious of that comforting inward glow which arises from the knowledge of a good deed well done. My uncle was a man of his word. Having said that he would visit the pavement artist, he might be relied upon to do so; and if material benefit did not thereafter accrue to Vivien's father, I should be mightily surprised. The thought cheered me, so that as I walked home I sang a little, to the evident discomfort of those who heard me.

IV

PRESSURE of affairs forbade me to seek out my one-legged friend on the next afternoon, but on the following day, timing myself to arrive just before tea, I came briskly around the corner—and checked abruptly, staring.

The pavement artist sat in his accustomed place, but not in his accustomed isolation. About him loitered a small crowd of assorted persons, gazing in the solemn silence of such crowds both at him and at

his exhibits. There must have been fully a score of these art lovers, nor did any one of them, as he or she moved on, fail to drop a specimen of our coinage in the hat.

I drew back and waited, too bashful to claim friendship with so sudden a celebrity. Minutes passed before I ventured forward, for as some paid their tribute and went away, others came hurrying from afar to take their place. At last, however, there came a moment when the crowd thinned temporarily to three—a nursemaid, a uniformed boy bearing a letter marked "urgent," and a slack-jawed youth of unemployable aspect.

Braving the stare of these die-hards, I approached the artist and hailed him.

"Good afternoon," I said. "Business seems to be pretty brisk."

He looked up, and I was surprised to see that he wore an expression of the deepest irritation. His fierce eyes glittered furiously, and his beard positively bristled. He spoke in a kind of snarl:

"Here, help me get away before any more of the fools turn up!"

I stared at him.

"What—" I began.

"Oh, Mr. Traill!" said a voice in my ear—a voice that caused me to start violently and grow suddenly damp about the palms of my hands. "I'm so glad you've come! Father's been in the most dreadful state! Are you going home now, father?"

The pavement artist was feverishly collecting his pictures and transferring a notable quantity of currency from his hat to his pocket with no more care than if it had been a pile of pebbles.

"Lend a hand, can't you?" he hissed at us. "There'll be more of 'em here in a minute!"

His daughter looked at me and nodded, as who should say:

"Humor the infant, please!"

I nodded back, feeling delightfully conspiratorial, and together we assisted Mr. Smith to gather up his belongings and start for home.

Not until the door of the whitewashed room was safely closed behind us did the pavement artist speak again.

"Why the devil," he demanded bitterly, throwing his crutch into a corner and himself into a chair, "can't people mind their own cursed business?"

"Father, dear," said Vivien, patting him soothingly upon the head, "please simmer

down! These naughty passions are awfully bad for you, and Mr. Traill hasn't the foggiest notion of what you're blithering about. Tell him while I get tea."

The pavement artist grunted peevishly, felt in his pocket, brought out a newspaper cutting, and handed it to me.

"That!" he said viciously.

I inspected the cutting. It was, I saw, from a local newspaper—the *Topping Hill Gazette*—and contained a letter to the editor. Thus:

SIR:

I feel it incumbent upon me, as a British citizen and a lover of art, to speak in the columns of your influential and popular journal on behalf of one who lacks the means or the opportunity to speak for himself. At the junction of Melrose Avenue and Laburnum Road there sits, day in and day out, a pavement artist whose work is of a quality which I, who know something of art, have rarely seen equalled. I do not hesitate to affirm, sir, that this man is a genius, if—as he states—the pictures which he exhibits are from his own brush. Their beauty of color, depth of feeling, and purity of tone would win them instant admission to any art gallery; yet their creator is compelled to spend his days upon the street, eking out a miserable existence upon such largesse as comes his way.

This manifest injustice, sir, this cruel slighting of genius, is a blot on the escutcheon not only of England, but also of our salubrious and genteel locality. The modesty of the person concerned, who refuses all information concerning himself, forces me to adopt this method of obtaining for him the recognition which his consummate artistry so richly merits. I look to you, sir, and to the warm-hearted denizens of Topping Hill and district, to insure that I have not appealed in vain. Let us, sir, help those who cannot, or will not, help themselves. I am,

Yours, etc.,

ARS LONGA, VITA BREVIS.

"Very prettily put!" said I, reaching the end of this effusion. "Hence the con-course, I take it. I hope you're properly grateful to this Roman gentleman."

"Grateful?" said the person concerned, with extraordinary bitterness. "Confound the old busybody! I'll bet it's the ass in the gray bowler who gave me twopence yesterday and asked if drink had brought me to this! If I see him again, I'll—I'll hamstring him!"

"Oh, come!" I protested. "Think of the box office!"

Mr. Smith glared at me, and began suddenly to empty his pockets out upon the table. Separating the silver and copper into little heaps, he rapidly assessed his fortune. Presently he looked up, and the scowl was deeper than before.

"Three pounds, seventeen, and elevenpence!" he announced.

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Vivien, at that moment entering the room behind a tray. "As much as that?"

To my complete astonishment, there was a note almost of sorrow in her voice.

"Three pounds, seventeen, and elevenpence!" repeated her parent, in the manner of one quoting his own death sentence.

I gaped foolishly from one to the other.

"Oh, come!" I said. "Three pounds, seventeen, and elevenpence may not be wealth, but it's not bad for a beginning. You'll do better to-morrow, now that people know about you. You mustn't expect too much at—"

The pavement artist turned upon me so menacing an eye that I shrank away.

"Bah!" he snorted. "Three pounds, seventeen, and elevenpence brings it up to four pounds ten and fourpence altogether—and the week's only half over!"

"Never mind, old man," remarked his daughter maternally. "It can't be helped, and the old idiot meant well, anyway."

I passed a bewildered hand across my brow, and, after one or two vain efforts, achieved faltering speech.

"But—but—I don't understand," I said. "Aren't you glad—"

"Glad?" roared Mr. Smith. "Glad? If I meet that infernal old fool again, I'll—oh, come in!"

V

SLOWLY the door opened, and there entered one at sight of whom I yelled in surprise. It was Uncle Ferdinand, gray hair, courtly manner, horn-rimmed spectacles, and all. His benign eye traveled over the company and came to rest upon me.

"Ah, Peter! Glad to see you, my boy! Vivien, my dear, positively you grow more comely every day. Sam, you look hot."

"Hot?" cried Mr. Smith. "I am hot! I owe you fifty pounds, Ferdinand, because an old fool in a gray bowler can't mind his own business! Of course I'm hot! And why do you call this person Peter? D'you know him?"

"To a certain extent," returned my uncle. "He's my nephew. He urged me to visit you, Sam; so behold me. His description of your genius was vastly attractive, and I intended to come to-day in any case. Tell me of this gray bowler—a dreadful form of headgear, in my opinion."

But here I had something to say.

"Uncle Ferdinand," I begged urgently, "what is this all about? Who is this—I mean, why—"

Uncle Ferdinand took snuff in his elegant way.

"Calm yourself, Peter! Do you mean to say, Sam, that the boy still doesn't know?"

"How should he?" demanded Mr. Smith.

"True," said my uncle. "How should he?" He cast a whimsical glance at me. "The choleric gentleman, Peter, is Mr. Samuel Rothery Ashburton-Smith."

A loud gasp issued from me.

"Ashburton-Smith?" I cried. "What—the painter?" For even a man who knew little of art had heard of Samuel Rothery Ashburton-Smith.

"The painter," confirmed my uncle. "A very good friend of mine, but rigid in his opinions, and lamentably addicted to gambling. Not long ago we fell into an argument, he and I, as to the ability of the public to recognize genuine merit in art. I maintained—and do still—that good work will always find appreciation. Sam, who has a sadly cynical outlook on life, took the view that people who will admire a picture in the Academy, say, because the newspapers tell them to do so, would not give it a second glance if they encountered it in the ordinary course of their daily lives. He further offered to wager fifty pounds that he himself could not earn four pounds a week by exhibiting half a dozen of his best works in the public street. As he lives most of the time in Scotland, and only comes to London once a year to buy a new shirt, he ran no risk of recognition. I accepted his offer, and a very deserving charity will now benefit to the extent of fifty pounds and Sam's takings—which, I gather, were more than he expected. That is all."

I said nothing—which at the moment was all that I was capable of saying.

"Mark you, Ferdinand," said Mr. Smith, "I'd have won easily, but for this! Confound, blister, and perish the old fool! I don't grudge the fifty, but I do hate to lose a bet!"

He thrust the letter to the editor into my uncle's hand.

"Ah, yes," said my relative. "The gray bowler." Gravely he read the thing through. "I see! So they mobbed you, Sam? I see!" He looked up at me and waved the cutting. "An effective if un-

necessarily verbose production. The style reminds me somewhat of yours, Peter."

"It ought to," I answered miserably, "because I wrote it."

This simple admission produced a considerable sensation. Mr. Smith bounded in his chair, Vivien turned a startled gaze upon me, and even my uncle displayed symptoms of surprise.

"You wrote it?" barked Mr. Smith.

"You wrote it?" cried Vivien.

"You wrote it?" said Uncle Ferdinand.

"If you wear a gray bowler, Peter, you're no nephew of mine!"

Mr. Smith emitted various more or less stupefied noises. Then he came leaping to the attack.

"And may I ask why the—"

At this point Vivien gave me proof of her quality, if such proof were needed.

"Father," she said sternly, "don't be horrid! I think it was very, very kind of Mr. Traill. He wanted to help us—you, I mean—and he didn't know it was only a bet. Moreover, it was noble of him to own up, knowing the kind of ogre you are. Now be good!"

Uncle Ferdinand chuckled happily.

"Peter," said he, "you've chosen a most capable champion. Swallow your very natural annoyance at getting the worst of it, Sam, and laugh a little. Then perhaps somebody will assure me that Peter does *not* wear a gray bowler."

For a moment Mr. Smith hesitated. Then, with alarming abruptness, he threw back his head and laughed so long and so loud that the window rattled and a picture slid from a chair. Presently, the paroxysm being spent—

"Mr. Traill," he said, "I apologize. You meant well, which is a sufficiently evil thing to say of any man; so let it go at that. With your permission I shall henceforth call you Peter, in token of my complete forgiveness. I must also apologize to the gray bowler when I meet it."

"Ah!" murmured Uncle Ferdinand. "I knew there must be some mistake!"

"And now," said Vivien briskly, "let us eat." She paused and looked at me with a little smile that made me catch my breath. "To make yourself thoroughly at home, will you fetch the kettle, please—Peter?"

I am now, I am happy to say, in a position to fetch the kettle for Vivien at any moment when she feels the need of it.

The Good Little Pal

HOW BARTY AND JACKO STARTED THEIR MARRIED LIFE
UNDER ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

IT was an afternoon very much like many other afternoons. Leadenhall stood on the corner waiting for her. He was so weary, and still so much absorbed in the work he had just left, he had waited for her so often, and he was so sure of her coming, that he scarcely thought of her at all.

It was five o'clock of a fierce July day, and the sun still blazed unabated in a cloudless sky. Before him, along Fifth Avenue, went an unceasing stream of busses and motor cars. The noise, the heat, the reek, the tireless movement, exasperated him. He wanted to go home for a cold shower and a quiet smoke. He wanted to be let alone.

Then he saw her, and there was nothing else in the world. She was coming down a side street with that eager, beautiful gait of hers, so straight and gallant, so self-possessed and debonair—and so touchingly slight and young. He noticed for the first time, with an odd contraction of the heart, how thin she had grown this summer.

She had stopped at the corner. She smiled at him across the stream of traffic, and a pang shot through him, because her dear face was so tired. He raised his hat, but he could not smile in return. All the other things—the minor things that had troubled him—were lost in his great anxiety for Jacqueline. He dashed across the street, with the luck of the foolhardy, and stood before her, looking at her in alarm.

"Jacko!" he said. "Jacko! You're tired!"

"Well, I know it," she answered, laughing. "So are you! Who isn't, this awful weather?"

But she stopped laughing as their eyes met. They stood there, looking at each other in silence for a long minute. Then

the color rose in her cheeks, and she turned her head aside.

"Barty, don't be silly," she said.

He did not answer. He took her arm to pilot her across the street again. It seemed to him a terribly frail arm. He seized it tightly, in a sort of panic. She meant to make a laughing protest against being hustled along in this fashion, but somehow the light words would not come. A glance at Barty's face made her heart sink.

"Oh, he is going to be silly!" she thought, in despair. "And I'm so tired, and so hot, and so—unconvincing!"

It had been decided between them that spring that they were to be simply good pals—until a more propitious season. They were not even engaged. No, they were both perfectly free. She had insisted that it should be so, and so it was. She was free to worry about him and yearn over him—even to cry over him night after night, if she liked. He was free, too, to do as he chose; but when she looked at him now, at the close of this weary day—

"You don't take one bit of care of yourself!" she said suddenly, in an angry, trembling voice. "I know perfectly well you've been smoking too much, and I know you didn't eat a proper lunch. Just look at you!"

He was startled.

"There's nothing the matter with me, dear girl," he said. "It's only—"

"I wish you could see yourself!" she cried. "You have a big black smudge on your chin!"

"Well, that's not fatal," he said, beginning to laugh; but then he saw tears in her eyes. "Jacko! You're nervous and upset. You're overworked. You're tired. You're—Jacko, you look like the devil!"

"Thank you!"

"I can't stand it," he went on doggedly, "and I won't stand it! I want to take care of you!"

"You said you wouldn't be silly, Barty!"

"Silly!" said he. "I've been a fool! I won't go on like this. If you love me at all, if you care for me even a little, you won't ask me to."

They had entered the park, and were walking down their usual path at their usual brisk pace, only that to-day Barty held her by the arm, like a captive, and their customary friendly conversation failed. The hour she had dreaded had come.

Barty was not easy to manage. Her ideal had been not to manage him, not to use any feminine arts to beguile him, but to be frankly and splendidly his comrade; but somehow that didn't work. She could not reason with Barty, she could not persuade him, she only could make him do as she wished by the power she had over him. He loved her so much that for love he would yield, and she did not want that. A true friend, a good pal, would not stoop to managing.

"Barty," said she, "let's sit down here and talk."

So he sat beside her on a bench and listened. All the time she spoke, she saw—with dismay, and yet with a queer little thrill of delight—that her words made absolutely no impression. Of course, she spoke of Stafford, because Stafford was the dominant factor in their problem. If Barty were to marry now, it would seriously offend Stafford, and that would be the height of folly.

A queer fellow, Stafford was—sensitive and touchy. He had done a great deal for Barty, and he expected Barty to appreciate it. Certainly he gave a great deal, but it had always seemed to Jacqueline that Stafford got the best of the bargain.

He was one of the foremost architects in the city. It was an honor for the obscure young Barty to be singled out by such a man, to be taken into his office, and, just recently, to be asked to share a studio apartment with the great man; but in return he got all Barty's honest enthusiasm, his fidelity and gratitude. He had Barty's companionship, Barty's sympathy for the many affronts this rough world offers to sensitive men.

Indeed, Jacqueline thought, he had a most unfair share of Barty's life; but Barty

did not see that, and she was not going to mention it. Not for any consideration on earth would she speak one word against Barty's hero. Not for any possible gain to herself would she tarnish his faith in his friend, or injure his prospects for the future. She simply spoke in a quiet, reasonable way of all that he owed Stafford.

"And when it means so much," she said, "to both of us—when it affects your whole future—"

"Well," said Barty deliberately, "I dare say you're right." She glanced up hopefully. "But I don't care," he went on. "I love you, and I won't go on like this any longer! I've tried, and I can't—that's all. I can't stand seeing you thin and miserable and shabby—"

"I'm not shabby, Barty!"

"You are—for *you*," he said. "You ought to have everything in the world! You're so beautiful and wonderful! And you won't let me do anything for you. You won't—"

"I would let you," she said hurriedly. "I'd let you—I'd love you to do all sorts of things for me, Barty. I'd marry you tomorrow, if—"

"If what?" he demanded.

This idea had been so long in her mind, these words had been so often on the tip of her tongue, that now she was going to speak them, whether he liked it or not.

"If you'd just get married—unostentatiously," she said.

"Unostentatiously?" he repeated. "I don't know what you mean, Jacko."

"I mean, just go down to the City Hall and get married, and you go on with your work, and I'll go on with mine, and we won't tell any one."

"Oh!" said he. "You mean secretly, do you?"

He was looking at her with an expression she had never seen on his face before. There was a hard, cold look in his gray eyes.

"It's no use talking about that," he said curtly, "because I won't do it."

But he did. Later on, she remembered that hour with bitter regret and remorse—the hour of her victory and his defeat. She had been unfair, cruelly unfair. She had made use of those tears which he could not endure. She had held out to him the prospect of gaining everything and losing nothing, of having her and yet not alienating Stafford.

He was ambitious, and she tempted him. She took advantage of his hot-headed, unreasonable love for her, and she conquered him; and his defeat was bad for her and worse for him.

She meant only to do him good, to help him; but she was very young, and she was a woman, and she had all a woman's blind and beautiful and absurd determination that her beloved should have his cake and eat it, too. Barty needed her, and he should have her; and he needed Stafford, and he should have Stafford too. Barty should have everything — except his own way.

II

Good pals don't mind waiting. They understand how unimportant are tea engagements compared with careers. They understand that often a man simply can't get away at a certain time. Even if he is too busy to telephone, even if he forgets the engagement altogether, why, a good pal accepts all that cheerfully.

Still, Jacqueline did not think it necessary to be superfluously cheerful. She was sitting at a table near the window of a down town tea room, waiting for Barty to join her.

The tea room closed at seven. It was now half past six, and she had been sitting there since half past five. The brightness of the September day had faded into twilight. The street outside, so crowded a little while ago, was quiet now. One by one people were leaving the tea room, so that she was surrounded by a widening area of empty tables. A group of waitresses stood in a corner, talking together. There was a general air of home-going; but she had no home.

"It's not Barty's fault," she said stoutly, to herself. "It was my own idea."

She had made Barty do this. She had insisted upon this sort of marriage. If it had turned out to be so much harder than she had foreseen, it was her fault, not his. She was gallantly determined to carry on to the very end, like a good pal. She did not want Barty to know how hard it was. She was glad he did not know, and yet—

If he had not become resigned to the situation quite so readily! They had been married seven weeks now, and his protests had ceased. He no longer rebelled. All his thoughts were of the future. He was working with a sort of dogged fury for that

marvelous future, so that the present seemed scarcely to exist for him.

"It's all for you, little pal," he had often said to her.

She knew he meant that, and she loved him for his ambition, his energy, his determination. Presently he would come hurrying in, eager to tell her exactly what he had been doing, absolutely confident that she would understand, that she hadn't minded waiting. He would talk about the fine things that were going to happen—in five years' time. He would talk about large, impressive things. The little things—*her* things—would never be mentioned.

For she could not hurt and trouble him by telling him how her back ached and her head ached from typing all day, or how unreasonable, how beastly, Miss Clarke had become, how lamentably the meals had deteriorated in her little hotel under the new management, or how very awkward it was to explain to sundry young men that she would never go out with them, and wished to see them no more.

"It would be like throwing rocks on a railway track," she reflected, smiling a little at the fancy. "It would derail poor Barty, just when he's flying along so splendidly, too!"

A very nice young couple at the next table rose and went out, and Jacqueline looked after them with a curious expression. She decided that they were engaged, would soon be married, and would go to live in a new little house somewhere, or even a flat—any place where lamps would be lighted at this twilight hour.

"Miss Miles!" exclaimed a delighted voice. Looking up, she saw Mr. Terrill. "I just dropped in to buy some chocolates," he explained, "and I saw you!"

He spoke as if it were the most amazing and delightful thing that could have befallen him. Never before had Jacqueline seen Mr. Terrill except in the presence of Miss Clarke, and she was surprised at the difference in him.

Miss Clarke, the authoress, somehow had a way of dwarfing all those about her. She was so brilliant, so handsome, so humorous. Jacqueline herself, secretary to this eminent woman, had always felt very young and very uninteresting, and Mr. Terrill had seemed to her an agreeable but rather insipid gentleman.

He did not appear insipid now. He had, thought Jacqueline, a really distinguished

air. He was a tall, slight man of perhaps thirty-five, with a sensitive, well bred face and a singularly pleasant voice. He was looking down at her.

"Miss Miles!" he said. "You look tired."

"I am tired," replied Jacqueline.

It was a relief to admit this, instead of pretending, like a good pal, that she was not tired and never could be tired.

"Can't we have a cup of tea together?" he asked.

"I'm waiting for some one," she told him.

"But can't we have tea while you're waiting?" said he. "The place will close in fifteen minutes or so, you know."

A queer little anger arose in her. Barty would not like her to have tea with Mr. Terrill. He was more than an hour late already, but he would think nothing of that. He would explain casually that he had been too busy to get away, and he would expect her to understand. Well, it was her own fault—she had told him so many times that she did understand.

"All right!" she said to herself. "There's no reason why I shouldn't have tea with Mr. Terrill. It'll do Barty good. Let him do a little of the understanding, for a change!"

But when the tea room had closed, and Barty had not come, she discovered that it was Mr. Terrill, after all, who exasperated her, because he was not Barty. It was her own Barty that she wanted, and no one else. The idea of Mr. Terrill presuming, even unconsciously, to take Barty's place!

She was humiliated, too, that Terrill should have seen her here, waiting and waiting for some one who did not come. She was so tired, so dispirited!

Terrill was walking along the street beside her, in the direction of the subway, and he was asking her to go down to Long Beach in his car on Sunday.

"Sorry," said Jacqueline curtly, "but I can't. I have an engagement."

"It would do you good," said Terrill.

"You look played out, Miss Miles. A day at the seashore—"

"I said I had an engagement," Jacqueline interrupted pettishly.

Terrill was neither discouraged nor offended, and his patience and courtesy made her ashamed of herself; but, for some inexplicable reason, being ashamed of herself caused her to behave still more outrageously

ly toward Terrill. She had never in her life been so disagreeable to any one.

The worst of it was that she found a wicked satisfaction in it, because she saw that Terrill regarded her little outburst of pettishness as an engaging feminine caprice. Apparently he did not care how trying she was. He seemed to think she had a right to moods and humors. Evidently he had no notion of her as a pal.

III

As she ate her solitary dinner, Jacqueline reflected upon this episode. Not a trace of wholesome contrition for her treatment of poor Mr. Terrill remained. On the contrary, the whole thing filled her with reprehensible contentment. Evidently Terrill admired her very much. She felt that she ought to tell Barty about him.

"And I'm afraid Barty won't like it," she thought.

Rank hypocrisy! Afraid? She hoped with all her heart that he wouldn't like it. What if he should be really jealous and angry, and should insist upon a public announcement of their marriage? What if she had to give up her job and just be Barty's wife?

A sudden rush of tears filled her eyes. Not for anything on earth would she hinder or worry Barty; but if he really insisted upon it—

He did not, however. Nothing, apparently, was farther from his thoughts. Before she had finished her meal, a bell boy came in to tell her that Mr. Leadenhall was waiting in the lounge, and she hurried in to him. She had entirely forgiven him for breaking that tea engagement. In fact, she was rather glad he had done so.

There he stood, waiting for her, and the sight of him aroused in her a tenderness that was half pain. Something she had once read in a book came to her now. "A young falcon"—that was what Barty was like. He was a strong, splendid, free creature whose heart would break if he were fettered.

"I'm not silly about him," she thought. "I know he's not so awfully handsome."

But she thought there was something about Barty that marked him out among all other men. His tie was crooked, his sandy hair was a little ruffled, he might seem to others simply a passably good-looking young fellow with a somewhat impatient and careless manner. His conver-

sation was practical enough for the most part. Indeed, his feet were solidly planted on the earth; but Jacqueline had had a glimpse now and then of his jealously guarded spirit, of his passion for beauty, of his love for the mute harmonies of his great art. She loved all that was Barty—even his faults; but his spirit she very nearly worshiped.

When she had first met Barty, she herself had been ambitious. She had wanted to write, to make a name for herself. She could laugh—or weep—at that thought now. Ambition? She hadn't known the meaning of the word. For no imaginable reward could she have worked as Barty did. He would work for days and days on a sketch or a plan, careless of rest or food, in a fire of enthusiasm. Then, putting his enthusiasm aside, and looking at it with his cool, impersonal brain, he would accept his work, or he would reject and destroy it and begin all over again.

Her own little ambition had flickered and died. It seemed to her a sublime destiny to help Barty, to serve this rare talent which her honest heart acknowledged as beyond measure superior to her own.

Their hands met in a formal clasp, and they smiled at each other, with their own secret smile of understanding. It was a wonderful thing to meet thus in public, and to let nobody know that they belonged to each other.

"Old Jacko!" said he.

"Old Barty!" said she.

Looking into his steady gray eyes, all desire to tease him about Mr. Terrill left her. All she wanted in the world was to help her man, at any cost.

"I've only got a few minutes," he said. "I've got to go back and finish that thing."

"The museum?" she asked, with a sinking heart, but with a bright expression of interest.

"No," he answered, with a trace of impatience. "That can't be hurried. This is a bit of hack work—a plan for remodeling a house that ought to be blotted out of existence."

"I hate you to do work like that, Barty!"

"Oh, do you?" said he, smiling. "Well, I'll tell you what it means, Jacko. The fellow's coming to look at the plans tomorrow, and if he likes 'em—which he will—it means a week off for you and me."

"Oh, Barty! You don't mean that we

could go away together for a whole week?" she cried. "Oh, Barty!"

"Don't, Jacko!" said he, turning away his head. "It—it makes me feel like a brute. You know, I had meant you to have a honeymoon in Europe."

"As if I cared!"

"Well, I care," said he, with a sort of fierceness. "You deserve it. You deserve—Jacko, you deserve more than I can ever give you in all my life!" He met her eyes, which were bright with unshed tears. "No one like you, Jacko!" he ended huskily.

IV

SHE made up her mind not to count upon that week together. She felt sure that something would happen to prevent it, that Miss Clarke wouldn't let her go, that Barty would be detained by some important work.

Hers was the wildly unreasonable pessimism of a woman's love. She foresaw the direst misfortunes, and was almost resigned to them. She was tired, too, after a long summer of hard work, and Miss Clarke was increasingly disagreeable to her. She was worried about Barty, worried about all sorts of absurd little things, so that she did not sleep well, and could scarcely tolerate the meals in her hotel. A whole week away somewhere with Barty? Impossible!

But on Sunday morning he actually came. She went upstairs and got her bag, which, with such wretched misgivings, she had packed the night before. She got into the taxi with Barty. His bag was in there. They really were going!

"But where?" she asked, like a happy child. "Where are we going, Barty?"

"Long Beach!" he said proudly. "You told me you liked it."

"I do!" she assured him earnestly.

After all, what if they did happen to run across Mr. Terrill?

"I've engaged a room," he went on, "for Mr. and Mrs. Leadenhall. If we see any one we know, all right. I'm pretty sick of this hole-and-corner business, anyhow."

It was then that she noticed there was something wrong with Barty—something very wrong. There was about him an air of grim recklessness, almost of desperation. He was trying to be jolly, but he achieved only a strained sort of hilarity utterly foreign to him, and beyond measure distressing to Jacqueline. She watched him with growing anxiety, pretending to believe in

his pretense, but positively sick at heart with apprehension.

They went all the way down by taxi.

"Hang the expense!" he said. "I've worked for it!"

And she pretended to enjoy the trip. She was even jollier than Barty. She spurred on her anxious heart to a hectic gayety. She talked and laughed, always with her eyes on Barty's face.

He had engaged not a room, but a suite of parlor, bedroom, and bath. Mentally she computed the cost of this, and was appalled; but even then she said nothing. If this was what Barty wanted, very well, she was glad he had it. If it gave him any joy to waste what he had worked so hard to get, very well, she would not spoil his week by a single remonstrance.

He was walking up and down the parlor, with his hands in his pockets, and Jacqueline was in the bedroom, unpacking her bag. She had said all the things she could think of in praise of the suite. While she tried to think of some more praise, a blank little silence had fallen.

"Jacko," he said, "you—you really do like this, don't you? You really will be happy here, won't you—for this week?"

He spoke like a doomed man, as if this week was to be their last. He didn't even try to smile. Jacqueline could not bear it.

"Barty," she said, "aren't you well?"

"Well?" he repeated, in surprise. "Of course I'm well! I'm always well!"

She hesitated for a moment. Then she got up and went into the parlor, barring his path, so that he had to stop short in his pacing; and she asked him the question that had been in the back of her mind all the time.

"Didn't Mr. Stafford like your going away, Barty?"

"Who cares?" said he.

She hadn't much doubt now.

"I'd like to know, though, Barty," she said quietly. "I'd rather know."

"I can't see that it makes any difference what Stafford says or thinks. After all—"

"I want to know, Barty!"

It seemed to her that this was the first time she had really felt like Barty's wife, with a wife's dignity, a wife's right to know what concerned her husband. She saw that he felt this, too, for his high-handed air was conspicuously absent.

"Well," he said, "if you must know, he made the devil of a row."

"Oh, Barty! But how unkind and unreasonable of him!"

"Well, you see," said Barty reluctantly, "he's sick, and—"

"Sick?"

"Some trouble with his eyes. Can't use them for a week or so. He wanted me to put off going away."

"Oh, why didn't you? Why didn't you?"

"Because I didn't want to. I had told you we'd have this week together."

"I'd have understood, Barty!"

"I know it; but, don't you see, Jacko, you're my wife, and you come first."

She began to cry foolish tears of tenderness and pride.

"That was very rash and imprudent," she began.

"I'm not prudent where you're concerned," said Barty, "and I'm sick of trying to be. If it hadn't been that I had promised you not to tell any one, I'd have told Stafford then that I was going away with my wife."

"What did you tell him, Barty?"

"Nothing."

"You must have said something!"

"I told him I had made arrangements for a week's holiday with a friend of mine, and I couldn't put it off."

Her moment of pride and delight was over now. She realized what had happened. For her sake he had left the friend to whom he owed so much at the time when that friend most needed him. It was the supreme proof of his love for her, but it was a proof which she must not and could not accept.

She gently pushed Barty into a chair. Then she sat on the arm of it and drew his head down against her heart; and with all the wisdom, all the ingenuity, all the art born of her love, she talked to him, argued, pleaded, warned, cajoled. There was dismay in her heart, but she was unwaveringly resolute, and she vanquished him.

Once more she took ruthless advantage of his masculine instinct to yield to the beloved woman whatever she asked. For the second time she safeguarded him to her own cost. Their love must be a help to him, not a handicap. She was not a weak, silly creature to be indulged and protected. She was his friend, his pal. She understood.

"I'll stay here by myself," she said, "and it'll be a splendid rest for me. Of course, I'll miss you, Barty, but we'll write

to each other every day; and it won't be very long before we shall be together all the time."

She managed to say this without a tremor, and even with a smile; but Barty could not respond. Almost unconsciously, she had used two terribly potent arguments. She had evoked the sacred name of honor, telling him that he was in honor bound not to desert Stafford; and she had warned him that, in hazarding his future prospects, he was endangering her happiness as well as his own. With these weapons she had defeated him.

They went down into the dining room for lunch, and it was dust and ashes to them. They sat facing each other across a small table. Their eyes met, they tried to speak, but what was there to say?

This was not an episode. It had the air of a final tragedy. Their week, their one beautiful week, was lost! And they were so young, so honestly and utterly in love! That day, neither of them believed that happiness would ever come again.

As they were leaving the dining room, a man rose from one of the tables and bowed to Jacqueline.

"Who's that?" asked Barty.

"Oh, I met him at Miss Clarke's," said Jacqueline.

At that moment Mr. Terrill was not of sufficient importance to have a name. He was less than nothing.

They went up to their suite again, and Barty put into his bag the few things he had unpacked so short a time before. Jacqueline helped him. She brushed his hair with his military brushes, she straightened his tie. She kissed him and sent him off with a smile.

"Oh, Barty! Oh, Barty!" she cried, after he had gone.

V

"STOPPING here?" cried a delighted voice.

Odd, how people keep on existing, completely unaware how superfluous they are! Jacqueline turned from her contemplation of the moonlit sea to the vastly inferior spectacle of Mr. Terrill, and answered him as civilly as she could just then.

"Yes," she said, "for a rest."

"Not a very quiet place for a rest," remarked Terrill.

"I don't like quiet places," Jacqueline replied impatiently.

He was charmed with this. The more unreasonable she was, the more he liked her.

"I enjoy a place like this," he went on; "but not for a rest. What appeals to me is the stimulation one finds in a motley crowd like this."

"Bah!" said Jacqueline, under her breath.

If he would only go away and leave her alone! His voice and his presence were an intolerable exasperation to her. She wanted Barty—and, failing Barty, she wanted to think of him undisturbed; but Mr. Terrill continued to exist, unabashed.

"It's a curious thing," he continued, "the transformation that certain qualities of light can effect. Of course, it's been pretty thoroughly studied in the theater; but to the average mortal—well, moonlight, for instance. I've seen your face in lamp-light and in the sunlight, but now, in the light of the moon—"

"It makes every one look ghastly, doesn't it?" Jacqueline interrupted hastily. "I hate it!"

"Hate moonlight, Miss Miles?" said he, mildly reproachful.

"Yes!" she answered stoutly. "I'm not one of those sentimental idiots!"

He seemed to grasp her meaning, for he asked, in quite a different tone, cheerful and matter-of-fact, if he might come down to visit her while she was stopping here.

"Oh, but—" said Jacqueline, dismayed. "You see, Mr. Terrill, I—"

He waited patiently for the reason why he must not come to see Miss Miles, and she tried hard to think of one.

"Well," she said lamely, "you probably wouldn't find me at the hotel. I—I take long walks, and I shouldn't like you to come all that way from the city, you know, and not find me."

"I'd take a longer trip than that, any day," said Terrill, "just on the chance of seeing you!"

She had to let that pass. There was no way of explaining to him; but she made up her mind that he should not find her in, whenever he might come.

The next morning she had a letter from Barty. He wrote:

You should have seen Stafford when I got back. There he was, sitting in the dark. I told him I'd thought better of it—took all the credit for your idea, little Jacko, but what else could I do?

I see now that you were right. It was so hard to leave you that I couldn't see it then. All the way back on the train I was thinking things about you that you wouldn't have liked. I thought you were a cold-blooded little beast to send me away like that; but after I'd seen poor old Stafford, I saw how right you were. You know, Jacko, I'd have given up Stafford, or anything else on earth, for that week with you, but you wouldn't let me make a fool of myself. I've got it in me, you know, Jacko. I could make the most exalted, glorious sort of fool of myself, and I'd enjoy it; but you'll always be my sensible little pal.

Jacqueline put down the letter and sat for a time staring before her, with a very odd expression on her face. Then she took it up and finished it.

Address letters in care of Jordan Galloway, Philippsville, Long Island. That is the nearest village, and I'll go there for the mail whenever I get a chance; but don't worry if you don't hear from me every day, dear girl, because sometimes I may not be able to get into the village.

And then many affectionate messages, and a check, "so that you can stay where you are for another week."

This check was the first money Barty had ever given her. He had paid for things—dinners, taxis, and so on—and he had bought her presents, but this was different. If she was his friend, his pal, why should she let him do this?

He warned her in his letter not to swim out too far. They had often bathed together. She was a good swimmer, strong and sound of wind, and she knew Barty was proud of her; but she could not swim as well as he. He could always have out-distanced her easily, if he had wished, but the idea of competition had never occurred to them. They were pals, friends, equals; but in almost everything he was stronger and more skillful.

He earned four times as much as she, and he was going forward while she stood still. When they went walking, she always tired first. Whatever they undertook, he did better than she, and it seemed to them both so much a matter of course that she had never thought of it before.

She looked about her, at those rooms, so terribly empty without Barty. She had made him go. She had sent away her man, telling him that she could do without him; but could she? He would do very well with Stafford. He would enjoy himself, no doubt, but how was it with her, left alone here, and sick at heart, longing and longing for Barty?

Suppose she had done wrong not to let him be a "glorious fool"? Suppose it was all a mistake to try to be a pal?

VI

MR. TERRILL did find her. He came across the beach to her, his thin, sensitive face bright with pleasure, and stood before her, hat in hand, looking down at her.

She was not sorry to see him. She had had no letter from Barty for three days. She had written to him every day—jolly, friendly little letters; and not a word from him! Three days!

"I went into the hotel and asked for you, Miss Miles," said Terrill, "but they would have it that there was no Miss Miles stopping there."

"How stupid!" murmured Jacqueline, with a smile; but at heart she was ashamed and distressed. "He ought to know," she thought. "It's not fair!"

But if he knew, what would he think of Barty?

"I came down in my car," Terrill went on. "I thought perhaps you'd let me take you for a ride."

"He's got to know!" she thought. "Poor thing! At least I can give him some sort of hint."

But he gave her no opportunity. He said nothing that could be seized upon as an excuse for mentioning that there was a Barty in the offing. It was his way of looking at her, the tone of his voice—intangible things which, of course, he meant her to notice. He very well knew that she did notice them, too.

It was a distressing situation, yet not without zest; for she was young and pretty, and when Mr. Terrill looked at her she felt ten times younger and prettier than when she sat on the sands alone and lonely. She tried not to like this, but she could not help it.

"We could run along the Motor Parkway," he was saying, "turn off at Philippsville, and go—"

"Philippsville?"

"Yes. Do you know that route, Miss Miles?"

"No, Mr. Terrill," said she.

He went on to describe the beauties of the trip he proposed. He need not have troubled. Any road that passed through Philippsville was of peculiar interest to Miss Miles. She accepted the invitation very graciously, and off they went.

It was a bright, cool morning, early in September, still summer, with summer's green beauty all about; yet in the air there was an indefinable hint that the end was coming. There was an invitation to haste, even to recklessness—to live in joy while the roads were still open, before the iron frost came.

Never had Mr. Terrill seen Miss Miles so charming. To be sure, she responded with frank mockery to his sentimental glances, but he could forgive that, because her mockery was so gay and so kindly. Indeed, he liked everything she said and everything she did. She was willful, lively, imperious, and he submitted gallantly to her least caprice. This went to Jacqueline's head a little; she found it only too agreeable to be imperious.

She made him stop the car while she gathered goldenrod and purple asters. She made him halt at the top of a hill and sit there for a long time in silence, while she admired the view. His patience and meekness encouraged her to further boldness. She insisted upon getting out of the car in Philippsville, pretending that she found that very dull and commonplace little village "quaint."

With the obliging Mr. Terrill she strolled down the drowsy, tree-shaded Main Street until she found what she was looking for—a sign reading "Jordan Galloway, groceries and hardware." Mr. Galloway's store she also acclaimed as "quaint." She went in, and bought some wizened little apples by way of excuse for lingering; and, behind the corner of a calendar hanging on the wall, she saw a little sheaf of letters addressed to Barty in her own handwriting. Then he hadn't troubled to come and get her letters!

She was glad that the store was so dim and shadowy, for she could not keep back the tears. Terrill was talking affably with the proprietor, and nobody was looking at her just then. She could struggle valiantly against her pain and bitterness, and could master them.

She had turned toward Terrill, outwardly quite cool and self-possessed again, and was about to suggest their going on, when a man came in—a man so incongruous in Philippsville that she at once suspected his identity. He was a tall, lean man, fastidiously dressed in a theatrical sort of camper's outfit—a gray flannel shirt, tweed knickerbockers, and high boots, all fatally

belied by his neat Vandyke beard, his delicate hands, his toploftical air. What was more, he was smoking a cigarette in a long ivory holder. It was scarcely necessary for Galloway to address him as "Mr. Stafford." She had felt sure enough of that already.

"Er—we want potatoes, Galloway," he said; "and—er—bread and bacon and coffee, and so on."

He went over to the calendar, took down the letters, and put them into his pocket. Then he saw Jacqueline. His hand went involuntarily to his hat, but he was wearing none, so he bowed gravely instead.

"Er—Galloway!" he said. "I'm in no hurry. Attend to the lady first."

"Thank you," said Jacqueline, "but I've finished. I was only going to ask if any one here would be kind enough to tell me where the old Veagh house is. I wanted to see that doorway."

"No! Really?" cried Stafford. "Upon my word, that's very interesting! You'll pardon me, but do you mind telling me where you heard of that doorway?"

"I read about it," said Jacqueline simply, "in a book by Luther Stafford, 'Vistas of Enchantment.'"

"No!" he cried, his dark face all alight. "Please allow me to introduce myself—Luther Stafford, the writer of that little book."

So it came about that Mr. Terrill and Mr. Stafford were presented to each other. When the enthusiastic Stafford suggested it, Terrill drove them all in the car to see the doorway of the old Veagh house; but he was singularly lukewarm about that architectural relic, and he did not even pretend to share in Miss Miles's hitherto unsuspected passion for old doorways.

No—he simply drove the car, and Miss Miles and Stafford sat on the back seat. He heard them talking. Miss Miles was not imperious now. She was so sweet, so gentle, so serious, so humbly anxious to be instructed. She seemed to possess such a surprising acquaintance with architectural terms!

And all the time Jacqueline was praying in her heart:

"Oh, let me make him like me! Oh, please, let me make him like me!"

If she could only win Stafford's unqualified approval, think what it might mean to Barty and herself! She had never wanted anything so much in her life before.

Barty had often told her that Stafford was the most thoroughly likable fellow he had ever met; but, hearing of the famous architect's high-strung nerves, his squeamishness, his minor affectations, she had privately doubted the soundness of this estimate. Now she understood, however. His fine enthusiasm for his art, his eagerness to share it, his spontaneous courtesy, and, above all, something generous and frank and indisputably great that was obvious in all that he said and did, won her immediate respect and liking. And, oh, how she wanted him to like her!

As they drove away from the abandoned farmhouse, it occurred to Stafford that the sun was going down the sky.

"By George!" he cried, alarmed. "I am an idiot! It'll be dark now, and I have all that stuff to carry back! The young chap who's with me is laid up—"

"Laid up?" cried Jacqueline.

"Yes, or he'd have come with me; but now—"

"What's the matter with him?" Jacqueline demanded fiercely.

Her tone made Stafford turn toward her, and Terrill threw a startled glance over his shoulder.

"Why, it's nothing much," replied Stafford, puzzled. "He caught his foot in an old trap that was buried under some leaves."

"Is it serious?"

"No, it isn't—not if it's properly looked after."

"What are you doing for it?"

He looked at her with a faint frown, and her eyes met his steadily.

"I want to know," she said bluntly, "because I'm Barty Leadenhall's wife."

There was a long silence. The sun had vanished now, and the dusty road before them was somber under the deepening shadow of the trees. The sky was pallid, the world was without light or color, and a terrible oppression had suddenly descended upon Jacqueline.

She no longer saw this episode as a gay little comedy. It was very close to tragedy. Her high spirits of the afternoon seemed to her now only heartless flippancy, tarnishing the dignity of her wifehood.

"Then you're the friend he went away with?" asked Stafford.

"Yes," she answered.

"And—did you send him back to me?" Her face flushed.

"He didn't need sending," she said. "He wanted to go. He—"

"I see!" said Stafford, and again he was silent for a long time. "I think you'd better come back with me," he said at last.

"But—you mean—now?" cried Jacqueline. "I don't see how—"

Terrill turned his head, only for an instant, just long enough for her to see on his face a smile she never forgot.

"I would if I were you, Mrs. Leadenhall," he said. "Set your mind at rest about—your husband."

There was nothing in his voice but honest, chivalrous kindness. He did not resent her trickery, he did not despise her. He was only kind—so kind that in the dusk she wept a little to herself.

VII

THEY set off together across the fields. Stafford was burdened with a tremendous sack, which he did not know how to carry properly. Jacqueline could have given him good advice, for she had had five years' experience of girls' camps; but she tactfully refrained.

Whenever they came to an unusually rough bit of the trail, Stafford took her arm, to render her assistance, which she did not in the least require; but she accepted it with polite gratitude. There was absolutely nothing of the pal in Stafford. He would only have thought the less of her for knowing how to carry heavy sacks, and for being able to look out for herself.

A canoe was waiting for them at the head of a lake. As a matter of course Jacqueline took up the second paddle, but Stafford earnestly entreated her to put it down. He paddled in a very amateurish fashion, and she could have done much better; but she held her tongue, and listened to Stafford while he reassured her about Barty.

Barty's foot had not been badly injured in the first place, and it was now almost healed.

"He's walking about," said Stafford. "He could just as well have come to-day, but I thought I'd like to try it alone."

The shores of the lake, where trees and bushes grew, were densely black, but in the center of the lake there was a dim reflection of the moonlight, though the moon itself was not yet visible. It was very still. The woods were all alive with bird, beast, and insect, and the water beneath the canoe

was teeming with life, but no sound reached their human ears but the dip of the paddle. Stafford's voice broke the stillness.

"There used to be Indians here," he said.

A singularly inept remark for a man of his intelligence, yet in Jacqueline's mind it conjured up the most vivid images. She turned her eyes toward the dark woods.

The naked, copper-colored figures which had passed by there, silent as the beasts themselves, the other canoes which had sped through these waters; and after them their enemy, the paleface—an enemy inferior in strength and endurance, ignorant of the forest ways, utterly alien here, and yet, because of the invincible spirit in him, always conquering. Indian and pioneer, warriors, hunters, killers—and behind them the faithful, patient shadow of the burden bearer, the woman. Squaw woman and white woman, carrying babies in their arms or on their backs, their own God-given burdens; and always with other burdens, too—the homely implements of daily life laid upon the shoulders of women, so that the hands of the men might be free for their weapons.

It had to be so. Only by the strong arm of her man could the woman and her child live; but all that was over and done with. Where civilization was established, woman was the friend and equal of man.

Jacqueline moved a little, uneasy and resentful at the thoughts that came to her. Those half legendary loves that were the glory of the civilized world, those names which had, after hundreds of years, still the power to stir the heart—*Romeo and Juliet*, *Hero and Leander*, *Paul and Virginia*—magic names of imperishable glamour and beauty! All good pals, weren't they? All the women for whom men had ventured sublime and terrible things, the women who had inspired the heroic undertakings of history and romance, the women for whom men had gladly died—all good pals, weren't they?

A pal? The nearest approach to a pal was the Indian squaw. She had shared her man's life, she had been his indispensable helper, and the humble, unconsidered bearer of his burdens. The whole idea was a turning back, a renunciation of something lofty and beautiful for something commonplace and inferior. Barty had wanted to be a lover, and she made him a comrade. He had asked for bread, and she had given him a stone. He had longed for the high romance and glory of life, and she had said

they couldn't afford it. She had tried to keep his money in his pockets for him. She had kept his spirit pinned to the earth.

VIII

THE sack had bumped poor Stafford black and blue. With a weary sigh he flung it across the other shoulder—and whack, those stony potatoes caught him on the left leg. But he was nearly there now. That silly, adorable girl must have had plenty of time to make her explanation to Barty. Stafford had sent her on ahead from the landing stage with an electric flash light. It was only a short half mile over a good trail, and he was only a little way behind her, never out of hearing of a call. He thought that she ought to see Barty alone. They must arrange their own affairs in their own pathetic, blundering way.

Whack! This time just behind the knee. Stafford flung the sack on the ground and began to drag it after him. Let happen what might, he had the tobacco safely in his pocket. If further meals depended upon carrying that accursed sack any more, then he preferred never to eat again.

Ah! He saw the flare of the camp fire now.

"Hallo-o-o, Barty!" he shouted.

"Halloo-o-o, Stafford!" Barty responded cheerfully. "What's been keeping you so late? I was beginning to get a bit uneasy."

Stafford made no answer, but came on at a very much quickened pace, dragging the sack behind him over the rough ground.

"Leadenhall!" he said. He stood still, looking anxiously about him. The flickering light of the fire illumined a small cleared space in the dark woodland, and there was no one there but Barty. "Didn't some one else come?" he demanded sharply.

"Some one else?" said Barty, with a laugh. "Expecting callers?"

Then Stafford told him.

At first it seemed to Barty preposterous, and even a little annoying, that the alert and self-reliant Jacko should have got herself lost in this fashion. The trail up from the landing was perfectly clear and easy to follow, and Stafford had given her his flash light.

Barty went all the way down to the lake again, calling her name. Then, as he stood on the shore of the black water, the note in his voice changed. A fitful wind had sprung up, driving clouds across the face of the moon. The trees stirred and sighed.

No matter what feminine folly had induced her to leave the trail, she *had* left it. She was gone, beyond reach of his voice. Which way?

He remembered Stafford's words—hard words for a young man of his temper to swallow.

"You accepted the responsibility for her life and her happiness," Stafford had said; "and you left her—a young, lovely thing like that. I think you failed her pretty badly, Leadenhall!"

It was Barty's way to hold his tongue, and he had held his tongue then, but he had thought.

"I tried to please her and I tried to please you," was what he thought; "and I'm hanged if either of you know what you want. All right—I do!"

So he had set off in a grim and dogged humor. Of course, he was glad—very glad—that Stafford had found Jacko so charming. Of course he did not object to her going about with that fellow named Terrill—certainly not! He trusted Jacko absolutely, and he was glad she had been able to amuse herself a little; only it was a queer sort of gladness. Of course, he wanted to be fair to his little pal.

"Jacko!" he shouted.

His lusty voice died away across the lake, and nothing answered. The canoe was still there, so she couldn't have gone back. She must have turned off the trail into the woods. It was not a cold night; and there was nothing there that could hurt her. Barty said that over and over again to himself as he turned back—not along the trail, but through the whispering wood.

His flash light threw a valiant little pathway through the surrounding darkness. He stopped every now and then to call her. He limped painfully, and because of his injured foot he had on soft moccasins, not good for going over stones and broken branches; but he could have gone barefoot over red-hot plowshares then, and scarcely known it.

What, nothing here to hurt her—little Jacko, alone in the black shadow of the whispering trees—in the forest, where the old enemies, the nameless and formless things, never wholly forgotten by the most civilized heart, still lurked? He saw the wood not with his own eyes, but with Jacko's. Little Jacko, with her eager, beautiful gait, her gallant little head held so high, and her pitiful youth and slightness!

"Jacko!" he shouted in anguish. "Jacko!"

He was in a panic now, trying to run, stumbling and falling, whirling the flash light in a wide circle, shouting until his voice was hoarse and strange. There was no fear, however baseless, that he did not feel for her now, no disaster that he did not foresee.

And at last he heard her. Her voice answered his.

"Here, Barty!" she called faintly.

He found her sunk on the ground in a heap, under a tree, white and limp.

"I got lost, Barty," she said, with a sob. "I'm—sorry!"

He caught her up in his arms and held her strained against his heart. The flash light had fallen to the ground, and he could not see her face.

"Are you hurt?" he cried. "Jacko, are you hurt?"

She flung her arms round his neck and drew down his head. He felt tears on her cheeks. He was filled with a sublime and almost intolerable tenderness for this beloved creature, clinging to him. He had no words. He could only hold her close in his arms and kiss her cold face again and again.

"Barty!" she said. "Your foot! Let me down!"

But he would not. He carried her back to the camp, and he did not stumble or falter once. White and haggard with exhaustion, he came staggering into the friendly firelight with Jacko in his arms, her face hidden on his shoulder, her dark hair hanging loose over his arm.

When he set her down, and she looked at him, she did not regret his pain, his weariness, or the fear he had felt for her. On his face there was a look that she would never forget—an exultation, a sort of splendor that stirred her beyond all measure. This was his hour, the hour that was due him, his hour of supreme effort and glorious victory.

He could not quite suppress a groan as he turned aside, for his foot throbbed horribly; but she knew that he was glad to endure it for her, that it was his right and his pride so to endure for the woman he loved. For the sake of his love she had done this for him. She had strayed away so that he might find her anew, so that they might start all over again, with the past effaced and the future all before them.

Barty came limping toward her with a plate of unduly solid flapjacks that he himself had cooked. He was followed by Stafford with a cup of ferociously strong coffee. Both of them were so anxious, so concerned, so busy doing clumsily what Jacqueline could have done so easily herself. What she longed to do was to throw

her arms about Barty's neck, to tell him that she did not want him to wait on her and serve her, but to let her help him and share everything, good or bad, with him.

But she stifled that longing. As he stood before her, she looked up into his face with a smile—a strange and beautiful smile which he did not quite understand.

The Tapa Cloth Map

THE ROMANCE OF JIM LATHROP, TOLO COOMBS, AND OLD METUA'S HOARD OF PEARLS

By Herman Howard Matteson

NEVER a vessel passed the lonely Puget Sound island where she lived that Tolo Coombs, in imagination, did not freight it with romance and adventure. The present ship, a topsail schooner, making but scant headway in the light breeze against the swiftly ebbing tide, was a tawdry affair, dirty and slattern; but the setting sun behind it silhouetted it sharply against the sky and glorified it into an argosy of portly sail. In her fancy, Tolo peopled the dirty tub with supermen who were faring home rich with the spoils of some high emprise.

A moment longer she gazed, then turned to her work. Tide waits for no man—and for no girl. Tolo made her living, and most of her father's living, by scraping barnacles from the rocks at low tide and shipping the dried shell to a poultry supply house in Seattle. Her skirts tucked high, her feet protected from the knife-edge barnacles by the bottoms of a pair of old rubber boots, which she had laced about her ankles sandalwise, she moved along the shore.

From the ship, across the sounding board of the ocean, there came an angry, bellowing voice. Men were running across the deck. Other voices shouted oaths and blasphemy. Blows were struck.

Presently, from out of the mass of weaving men, one fellow detached himself. With his back to the after bitts, he struck out savagely. A man went down and then

another. The fallen combatants scrambled to their feet. Four men, or perhaps five, were besetting the fellow with his back to the bitts.

Again he struck out, and again. Through the space that he had cleared for himself he ran along the deck, leaped the rail, and dived into the water. When he came up, he was swimming toward shore with a sailor's overhand stroke, splashing loudly, but swift.

Now the bellowing voice that first had come to Tolo's ears rose again. This would be the master of the ship, and he was ordering his men to lower away the work boat, overhaul the fugitive swimmer, and fetch him back.

The falls of the work boat fouled. To the accompaniment of frantic oaths, the sailors strove to free the tackle and lower away the boat. Her hands clenched to her bosom, Tolo watched the swimmer. He was a hundred yards from the ship—two hundred yards. Still the tackle of the work boat stuck.

Then Tolo uttered a scream. The swimmer was heading straight into a nest of swirling tide rips that lay between ship and shore. No swimmer could make it through those rips. They would test the stanchness of a good dory.

The skipper of the schooner, watching the progress of the fugitive from the bow of his ship, suddenly sang out to his men

to belay. Voices mingled in excited argument, and then all was still aboard the dirty looking topsail schooner. In an instant the cold devilishness of the situation struck in upon Tolo's horrified consciousness. Noting the deadly tide rips into which the swimmer was heading, the skipper had ordered his men to cease lowering the boat. The fugitive, left to himself, would indubitably drown.

Tolo ran to where her own dory lay drawn up on the sands. She thrust it into the water, sprang in, and took up the oars. With all her practiced might she drove the boat straight to where the man had begun to twist in the grasp of the swirling rips.

The shadows lay low and dense along the shore, and Tolo had almost reached the struggling swimmer before her attempt at a rescue was noted from the ship. Then the bellowing cry went up again, to "lower away the work boat." This time the falls did not foul. In an instant the ship's boat was in the water, and, manned by a crew of two, was heading into the tide rips.

Fortunately, Tolo had a start. Her boat twisted and spun, but it answered the pull of her round, strong arms. Presently she reached overside and grasped the swimmer by the shoulder. By his own struggling and her pulling, he climbed over the gunwale and fell into the bottom of the dory.

The work boat was coming with all the speed of which two tough-handed sailors were possessed; but Tolo's dory was the nearer to the shore by two hundred yards, and her lithe, supple body was habituated to the handling of the little craft.

"You got to help me get away—just got to!" wheezed the young man, as Tolo headed the dory for shore.

The girl nodded her head and bent to the sweeps. The young man floundered toward her on his knees and laid his big hands to the handles of the oars, beside her tiny ones. As she pulled, he thrust upon the oars.

"You got to get me away," said the young man hoarsely, pushing at the oars with all his strength. "My first chance to escape in months! I just got to get away!"

Abating none of her effort, Tolo glanced over her shoulder toward the shore, and then back to the pursuing work boat.

"I'll help you," she panted, her breast heaving. "The instant the dory hits the shore, you jump, and then follow me. I'll get you away! We'll make it! They hain't gaining any on us! We'll make it!"

The prow of the dory grated upon the sands, and Tolo leaped to the shore. The young man sprang into the shallow water, and came clumping up the slope in his heavy sea boots, as Tolo ran straight toward the steep, heavily wooded bluff that marked the border of the graveled beach. The fugitives were struggling up a rough and winding trail upon the face of the bluff when the work boat landed. The two men from the schooner came shouting after them.

"Hurry!" Tolo gasped back over her shoulder to the young man, who seemed to be running with a painful limp. "Hurry! This trail crosses a cañon, a bit farther up. If we beat 'em there—"

The pursuers were gaining upon the fugitives, whose flight was retarded by the young man's lameness. Tolo fell back a step, grasped his arm, and ran with him. At last they came to the border of a steep-sided cañon that debouched upon the shore line. A foot log crossed the deep ravine.

Tolo ran ahead, and the young man, who was used to dizzy climbing in the tops, crossed behind her. Then the girl began to heave and tug at the end of the foot log. The youth added his strength to hers, and the log went crashing and hurtling into the cañon depths just as the pursuing sailors came, puffing and swearing, to the opposite side.

"Come on!" said Tolo, laughing softly. "They can't follow, except by crawling down the cañon and crawling up again, and it's full of that spiny devil's club bush. In ten minutes it'll be darker than cats in these woods. By the time they follow up shore, and then by the trail to where my cabin is, I'll have you hid good. You're safe, big boy! Come on, and take it easy. You bad hurt? You limp quite a lot."

"Yeah, I got bunged and hurt fighting, and I stove a knee when I jumped the rail; but I'll be all right. You sure done a man's work, little matey, salvaging me out of them tide rips! I just got to get even with you some day for that!"

"It's no matter," said Tolo. "The men on the schooner would 'a' let you drown in the tide rips. Funny! One minute they act like they're plumb crazy to keep your company, and then next they act like they want you to die!"

"That's just it exact," said the young man. "They want my society exclusive, or they want me dead. That's it exact. I

been trying for four months to jump ship. This was the first chance—a slim one, but I grabbed it. I'd 'a' failed but for you, little matey. You done a man's work—done it good!"

"I'll hide you good, too," offered Tolo. "I'll fetch you *muckamuck* to eat and blankets for a bed. Course, I figure you hain't done anything—that is—"

"Say, little matey, listen while I tell you about it. Then, if you think I hain't in the right, whistle Gaff Clintock in and tell him where he can overhaul me!"

II

As they walked slowly along the trail, now in dense darkness, Tolo guiding the way, the young man told his story:

"I signed on the Roamer in Seattle—three years' cruise to the South Seas. If the wind would shift, you'd smell the copra that's below her hatches. We was hove to off Panang Island, not so far from Tahiti. Measles is raging on Panang. Measles is tough in the tropics. There's an old native called Metua, and he's got a coconut grove, and lots of dried copra. He's berthed in with measles, too. Gaff Clintock makes a dicker with Metua, before he's took bad, to buy his copra, so much a pound. Gaff loads the copra, and he turns in the weight to old Metua about one-tenth of what it really is. I think that's low-down, cheating an old stager that's hove to helpless with measles. I make a row with Clintock, and he pays Metua some more—not all, but more. The old boy's grateful to me for this. Besides, he's all alone in his shack, what they call a *fare*. So many natives is sick, there hain't no one to take care of no one else. I shake down Metua's bed for him, and I feed him coconut milk when his fever's bad, and I wet a cloth and keep it on his eyes; so I and him get very friendly, him speaking some English, and me knowing maybe twenty-five Kanaka words. Metua is a soft-spoken old fellow, with snow-white kinky hair, and a gentle way, like a man that had met his troubles brave. He gets worse with his sickness. One thing makes him worse is word that's brought that his old sister, and a nephew—all the close blood kin he's got—has just died. From there, Metua sinks very fast. He says he might as well travel on to *ra'i*—that's Kanaka heaven—and be done. Very weak, he kind of chants a death song. Then he calls me to come closer alongside. He tells me how, formerly, he

used to be a five-minute pearl diver. Then, pretending to raise coconut exclusive, he goes to pearl pirating. That means he kept on pearl diving, but instead of declaring his pearls to the French government, which claims a big share of all pearls, Metua takes and hides 'em. The old man says to me how he's got a double fistful, pretty near, of fine pearls hid out in a pandanus thicket. Speaking a kind of savage blessing at me for what I done for him, he tells me to fetch a piece of tapa cloth that's on a shelf. I done it. Tapa cloth is a native cloth that's like blotting paper, only tougher. The old man has me take the cloth off his eyes, and he takes a nail, and he scratches on the tapa cloth a map showing trees, a bowlder, the meander line of the shore, and a spot where the pearls is hid. He makes his tapa cloth map, Metua does, and then he lays back and tells me to lean down and touch noses with him for good-by. I done it, and he died.

"I and a stray Kanaka take and bury Metua decent, and then it's just daybreak. Natural, I was in a big hurry to go pearl hunting. I done a foolish thing. Instead of waiting for night, I went careering off into the woods, laying my course by the reckoning on the tapa cloth map. It was terrible foolish of me. Gaff Clintock misses me at my regular work of loading copra. Likewise he heard about old Metua dying, and the yelp that went up from half the live Kanakas on the island claiming they was Metua's close kin, and entitled to his pearls. While Metua was alive, all the natives kept dead still about the old man being a pearl pirate. The minute they knowed he was dead, everybody was a relative, and all came simooning in and wanting the pearls broached out. Of course, the French governor got wind of 'em; but Gaff Clintock and two hands off the Roamer heard about 'em first. I'd been seen to crawl into the pandanus thicket by a native. Here come Gaff and the two hands hunting for me. I seen 'em, and I starts to run, but they spread out fanways, and head me off, and there's a fight. I done very good against the three till Billy Benson, one of the hands, crawls behind and douses me back of the ear. I go down, and all hands pile on top. I fight up to my feet again, but I get another douse, and Gaff Clintock is fumbling for a knife. I see it's no use, so I reaches in my pocket and hands over the tapa cloth map.

"Right that minute here comes the

French governor, who wants half of them pearls for the government and likely a stray or two for hisself. Gaff tells him that I'm a hand jumping ship, and that he'd overhauled me, and was fetching me back to my boat. With that Gaff and the two hands and me, we went back to where the Roamer is about through loading what copra there is on Panang. Gaff heaves me to in the glory hole, battens the booby hatch, and sets a hand to guard on the deck with a shotgun; but he finds it hain't good weather signs for pearl hunting. The whole island, including the governor, is pearl hunting. Gaff examines the tapa cloth map, and sees that without the map to go by, chances is strong no one will find old Metua's pearls in a thousand years. So he heaves up the hook, and away we go, Gaff aiming to finish loading copra at a near-by island, and then beat around to the east side of Panang after the pearl hunting excitement is over, creep acrost the island, dig up the pearls, and wing out for Seattle with both the pearls and a full cargo of copra.

"Well, keeping me battened below hatches, and handing me down prog in a pannikin three times a day, Gaff finishes loading the copra on the other island, up anchor, and around to the east side of Panang. His plan would 'a' worked but for one thing—a hurricane that blowed up. It blowed seventeen days and nights. When it blows to a calm, by dead reckoning we're fourteen hundred miles from Panang. All this time, even when we're scudding before that hurricane under sticks, whenever I get a chance I raise a terrible howl about Gaff stealing my tapa cloth map; but Gaff just laughs, and puts an extra bolt on the booby hatch.

"Then, when it comes to recasting sails that had blowed at the clews, bending on a new foretops'l, and a fore club tops'l, and steadying the sticks in the steppings, I'm needed, and Gaff lets me out; but we're hundreds of miles off any shore, and Gaff has my tapa cloth map locked in a desk in his cabin in the afterhouse. What can I do? They're five to my one, Gaff gaining all the hands to his side by promising that when he gets the pearls, all shall have a sailor's prize money share. We don't touch at any port. Gaff decides the pearls are safe in hiding, and that he'll put into Seattle, discharge cargo, and then sail back to Panang.

"The farther away we get from Panang,

the more liberty I get; but I'm watched night and day, and Gaff guards the desk in his cabin like it was the mint. What can I do? I can't do nothing, and I don't, until we get here into Puget Sound. This island is the first land we've fetched down in swimming distance. I'm just crawling into the tiller chains, aiming to drop soft into the water and swim it, when Billy Benson makes me out, drags me back on deck, and raises a hail. Then's when the fight was that you seen, and me, final, jumping the rail. You done man's work, little matey, salvaging me out of the tide rips! Now—"

"But the tapa cloth map!" interjected Tolo. "The map is yours, and it shows where the pearls are hidden. Are you giving up without a battle. Oh, I know—you remember the map. You don't need it. If I can get you to Victoria, you can take a fast Oriental liner to Tahiti, and beat that tub of a schooner by days and days. You can go to Panang, dig up the pearls, and then—"

In the fervor of her sudden partisanship for the young sailor, Tolo seized his sturdy arm and hurried him along the dark trail.

"We'll just get a snack to eat at my cabin," she said. "Then we'll get into my dory, and we'll be over in Victoria before daybreak."

"You got more than one dory, little matey?"

"No—why?"

"Have you got any other craft than that dory on the island?"

"No—why?"

"You don't know Gaff Clintock! Long before now he's figured out all about that fast liner to Tahiti. He's ashore by now, on this island. He's got your dory watched, and all five of the hands is combing these beaches and woods to find me. You don't know Gaff Clintock!"

"Well, do you remember the map, if I could get you away?" said Tolo, striving to hide her disappointment.

"I partly remember it. I'd make a try for the pearls without it, if I had to; but I can't say I remember the fine details. It's too long since I fetched a look at it."

"Oh, dear! And he's got it, on the ship! Are you sure he'll range the island and keep up the hunt for you?"

"He sure will! Gaff Clintock thinks I know that map better than I do; and he hain't a man to quit out where a fortune is to be had. Besides, there's flaws in your plan, little matey. First place, I'm ar-

titled to Gaff Clintock till I'm paid off in Seattle. By law, till I'm paid off, if he finds me, he can take me. Another bad thing is, even if I got to Victoria, the cheapest third cabin fare to Tahiti would be over a hundred dollars, and I hain't got a trade settlement shilling until I'm paid."

"A hundred dollars! Oh, dear, that's a lot of money!" Tolo brought the young man to a sudden stop. "One thing's sure," she said earnestly. "This Gaff Clintock has to find you before he can take you, legal or illegal. If he's dead afraid you remember the map, he's going to stick right close to this island and keep up the hunt, ain't he?"

"That's the program," agreed the boy.

"All right—I'll hide you where he won't find you, and in the meantime we'll figure out a plan. You wait here. I'll fetch some *muckamuck* and some blankets. I know a place where he won't find you easy. Wait!"

The young man stood beneath the great fir where Tolo had brought him to a stop. She hurried away, to return presently with a little bundle in her hand and a roll of blankets under one arm.

"You're right about Gaff Clintock," she whispered. "I can hear the men on the beach, running up and down and talking to one another; but they won't find you easy where I'm going to hide you. Follow me, and don't make the least bit of noise if you can help."

Swiftly through the wood she led the way. Where a giant windfallen fir had lifted a hole in the earth, and creepers and shrubs had grown densely over the cavity, Tolo spread the blankets for him. He crawled into the nest beneath the gnarled roots of the tree. She handed him the package of food. Seated upon the blanket, he unlaced his heavy sea boots, and, sailor fashion, placed them beneath his pillow.

"What might your name be?" Tolo asked.

"It's Jim Lathrop. What's yours?"

"Tolo Coombs. Good night! I'll watch good. I'll fetch more *muckamuck* before that's gone. Good night! You're safe here."

Tolo crawled from beneath the roots of the tree, and by a devious route returned to her cabin. There she found evidence that Gaff Clintock was making good the reputation given him by Jim Lathrop. The door stood open. Tolo knew that she had

closed and latched it. Evidently Clintock's men had invaded her house, searching for Jim Lathrop.

III

SOMEWHAT fearfully Tolo entered the cabin, lighted the kerosene lamp, and looked about her. A chair had been overturned, and the door into her sleeping room stood open.

With a little cry of fear she righted the chair, drew it to the shelves ranged along one side of the living room, and climbed upon it. From the rear corner of the shelf she took down an old, cracked teapot, which she shook sharply. When the pot gave off a metallic rattle, the expression of apprehension on her countenance faded. Clintock's men, fortunately, had not found her savings bank.

She went to the table and emptied the contents of the pot upon the boards. She sorted out a few bills, some silver dollars, half dollars, and smaller coins, and counted them over several times. The contents of the pot were intact, yet no legerdmain of counting and recounting would make the total add up to more than one hundred and five dollars and sixty-seven cents.

Tolo turned resentful eyes toward a rude cabinet that stood in the corner of the room. She doubled her little fist and shook it angrily. But for the contents of that cabinet, she would have had considerably more in the cracked teapot than one hundred and five dollars and sixty-seven cents.

There was an electric belt. Her father had bought that, with Tolo's shell money, when he had thought that he had sciatic rheumatism. Then there were other alleged curative contraptions, bottles, ointment jars, and a big, thick, new "doctor book." At this very moment, with sixty dollars of her money, her father was in Seattle, taking a treatment for something or other—a new symptom that had just come upon him lately, and concerning which the new book was vague and unsatisfactory.

A tear plashed down upon the old cracked teapot as she counted back into its capacious maw one hundred and five dollars and sixty-seven cents.

Replacing the pot upon the shelf, Tolo blew out the lamp, stole from the cabin, and walked down the trail that led to the shore.

Jim Lathrop had been quite right concerning the tenacity and watchfulness of

Gaff Clintock. A camp fire gleamed upon the beach, and her dory was drawn up near it. Men were patrolling the beaches, and she could even hear the betraying crack of brush and dead sticks inland. Some member of the crew was keeping up the hunt in the dead darkness of night.

Tolo smiled and shook her head. They would never find the fugitive where she had hidden him—at least, not in the nighttime.

Then the girl's smile faded. A quarter of a mile off shore the schooner rode at anchor, its riding lights blinking in the darkness. With the coming of day there was a chance that Clintock's men would find the hollow beneath the windfall. The only means of escape from the small island—her dory and the ship's work boat—were in the hands of the investing enemy.

Tolo turned back toward her cabin. Just to wait, just to depend on Jim remaining undiscovered, wasn't going to be enough. Some more aggressive plan was needed.

Just before day, Tolo crept through the wood to the young sailor's hiding place. She awakened him with a gentle push upon his shoulder, and told him her plan.

Mightily Jim protested.

"It's too dangerous, Tolo! You don't know Gaff Clintock! I could tell you some things—no, it's too dangerous!"

"Listen, Jim! I got a hundred and five dollars and some cents, and I'll lend it to you. It's in the cracked teapot on the top shelf. I'll be using my dory all day—they'll watch me, but they can't keep me from using my own boat—and I'll leave it just at dark by the big gray rock at the east end of the island, tied out in the kelp. In ten strokes you can swim to where it'll be. You've just got to have the tapa cloth map, Jim. You say you hain't fetched a look at it for months. If you were to take a liner to Tahiti, get safe to Panang 'way ahead of Clintock, and then find you didn't remember where the pearls was hid, why, it would be terrible! To be safe, you've got to have the map, and I aim to get it for you. Now remember the plan, Jim. If they come too close during the day, you're to crawl out the back end of the hole and go across the island that way."

Tolo pointed to the west and south.

"Then, when it gets dark to-night, you crawl out this way—north. There's an open space among the trees, where you can see the riding lights of the schooner. When

you get the signal, you run as fast as you can to my cabin, and you take and put the hundred and five dollars in your pocket. You wait for me at the cabin. When I come back with the tapa map, you run off and swim out to where the dory will be tied to the kelp. I'll watch. If Clintock and his gang come, I'll run into the woods as noisy as I can, to make 'em think it's you."

"Too risky, Tolo," protested Jim. "You don't know Gaff Clintock!"

"And neither him nor you know me," returned Tolo pluckily. "It's too big a risk for you to go 'way back to the South Seas without the tapa cloth map. We've just got to have it!"

Silencing Jim's further expostulations, Tolo finally left him, after reviewing the details of her plan.

"Keep your eye on the ship's riding lights," she cautioned. "Soon as ever it's dark, keep your eye on the lights!"

IV

THROUGHOUT the remainder of the day, Tolo played at fox and geese with the men of Clintock's crew. Several times, when she knew that their search was carrying them dangerously near the windfallen fir, she ran through the brush or rattled loose stones down into the cañons; but as the day wore away, she became more and more convinced that it was only a matter of time when Jim Lathrop's hiding place would be discovered.

About mid afternoon she walked boldly down the beach and shoved her dory off from where Clintock had drawn it up. She had with her her barnacle hoe, and one of the jute bags in which she gathered the loose shell.

As she stepped into the dory, a man rose from the shrubbery. Jim had been right in his surmise—Clintock was having the dory watched and guarded. As Tolo rowed slowly down the beach, pausing now and then to lean over the side of the boat and peer in under the rocks, as if seeking to locate promising beds of barnacles, the man followed.

After about an hour, however, he seemed to be convinced that Tolo was only looking for deposits of shell, and his surveillance relaxed. He walked down the beach, in a direction opposite to that in which the girl was rowing. Once or twice he glanced back over his shoulder; then he seated himself

upon a boulder and filled and lighted his pipe.

Back and forth Tolo rowed the dory until she saw what she had really been watching for—Clintock's work boat rowing out to the schooner, propelled by two men whom the skipper had ordered to light and swing in place of the riding lights. By this time the shadows lay long upon the waters. In half an hour it would be quite dark.

Quickly Tolo rowed the dory around the point. Then she removed her dress, wrapped it in a snug bundle, and fastened it to the top of her head with a string. Clad only in her homemade knickers and slip, she pushed her boat into the midst of the thick bed of kelp, and made the painter fast to a strong stem. Then she pulled the sea plug from the bottom of the dory, and tied it to the string that attached one of the oarlocks. The boat began to fill.

Tolo lowered herself over the side and swam through the kelp to the shore. The dory had sunk to the level of the gunwales. To any but the most searching gaze, it was lost in the bed of kelp.

The girl put on her dress, ran down the beach for some distance, climbed the bank, and finally came to a pause in the shrubbery, directly above where Clintock's camp fire glowed. This spot, she had observed, appeared to be the skipper's headquarters, to which his crew came to report matters touching incidents of the man hunt.

Clintock was hovering over the fire. One of the crew came up, and the two engaged in a brief conversation, the words of which Tolo could not catch. Finally the man left, walked down the beach, climbed the bank, and plunged into the woods.

In the still night air there sounded the creak of a block, as the riding lights were hoisted. Then the work boat came rowing in, and was beached before the camp fire.

Tolo crept softly from her hiding place and walked swiftly to a spot about two hundred yards to the eastward of the camp fire, and beyond the range of its feeble, fitful light. Hiding her dress behind a boulder, she waded cautiously into the water, breasted the waves with no more splash than a sea otter would have made, and swam swiftly toward the anchored schooner.

At this stage of the tide her course was free of dangerous rips, and she made the distance to the schooner without difficulty. She trod water, grasped the tiller chains, drew herself up, and climbed to the deck.

Crouching below the level of the rail, she crept to the companionway and descended to the galley. Fumbling about over the work table, she located a sharp knife thrust into a loop, and beside it a long, strong-pointed steel sharpener.

With these in her grasp she went up to the deck and boldly opened the door of the cabin in the afterhouse. More fumbling about in the darkness located the desk of which Jim Lathrop had spoken. She felt over the front of the desk and inserted the point of the steel in the hasp. With a few twists and wrenches she worked the hasp loose.

Letting down the desk front, she began feeling through the pigeonholes. It took time, but at last she found what she sought—a cylinder of blotterlike paper.

Nestling the tapa cloth map in the masses of her thick hair, Tolo changed the position of two or three hairpins, thus anchoring the precious bit of paper firmly in place. With the steel, she hastily pounded the hasp and the padlock back in place.

Hurrying from the cabin, she dropped the steel overside as she sped to the bow of the ship. Here she knelt, and began sawing away with her knife at the thick anchor hawser where it came through the hawser hole. Presently the anchor end of the hawser dropped into the water.

Instantly the schooner, feeling the urge of the growing current, began to swing. Tolo stood for a moment, glancing up at the riding lights. These lights, changing position against the night sky, and visible from the open space near Jim Lathrop's hide out, were to be a signal to Jim to fly to the cabin, get the money from the cracked teapot, and await Tolo's return.

For a moment longer she stood upon the deck, watching the lofty lights. Then she ran to the schooner's stern, lowered herself by the tiller chains, and swam away toward shore.

She had taken no more than a dozen strokes when a mad cry from shore disclosed the fact that Clintock's men had seen that the Roamer was adrift. More shouts sounded, and oaths. Tolo, swimming rapidly, could hear the rasp of the work boat's keel as it was dragged over the gravel.

Clintock's first concern would be to save his drifting ship, which, if allowed to float at the mercy of the strong tide, would inevitably crash itself to bits on one of the

numerous reefs. For a time, until they regained control of it, the entire concern of the Clintock outfit would be centered upon the schooner. On this fact depended Tolo's whole scheme for the escape of Jim Lathrop.

V

THE best-laid plans have a way of going awry in some unanticipated detail. So far as cutting the Roamer loose was concerned, that had worked beautifully. The swiftness with which the schooner drifted away showed at once that the anchor hawser had been severed. It would not be safe again until a new anchor was broken out from the hold, made fast to a new hawser, and dropped. Anchors are weighty affairs, and the task would require the services of the skipper and all his crew.

In response to Clintock's mad bellow his men came running. The work boat was launched, and the entire crew rowed away toward the drifting ship.

At this point came Tolo's ill luck. She had not counted upon the strengthening tide. In spite of her most frantic effort, it was sweeping her along with the drifting ship, and fairly into the path of the onrushing work boat.

In the paroxysm of terror that swept over her, she began to flounder and thrash the water. The man riding in the bow of the work boat raised a shout and pointed. The boat veered a trifle. The long, strong arm of Gaff Clintock reached out, and drew the shrinking girl over the gunwale.

Like a wild cat she fought him, but he crushed her body to him with brutal strength and stifled her cries with a gross hand laid bruisingly over her lips.

When the work boat came alongside the drifting schooner, Clintock sent a man swarming to the deck. A sea ladder was dropped, and the skipper, still clutching his prisoner, mounted to the deck and bore her into the after cabin.

With surprising speed a new anchor was broken out, made fast to a hawser, and dropped overboard. With blistering oaths, Clintock, quite aware that some scheme for Jim Lathrop's escape was in the working, ordered his men to return to shore.

"Every man jack of you ashore!" he shouted. "Get Lathrop, if you have to kill him! I'll stay right here, and entertain the young lady. Well, move!"

The men went clattering down the sea

ladder, pushed off, and rowed rapidly back to the island. Gaff Clintock stepped across the floor and dropped the inside catch upon the door. Then he lighted the swinging slush light. In its fitful yellow glow he stood leering horribly at his shrinking captive, who sat, with her sparse garments plastered to her like her skin, upon a transom bench.

As Clintock moved across the cabin floor, with his hard eyes bent upon the girl, an appalling fear swept over her. The skipper tried the lock of the cabin port light, satisfied himself that it was securely fastened, and sat down, face to face with Tolo.

From one single circumstance she extracted meager comfort. Clintock's glittering eyes were directed only at her. He seemed to have taken no thought of the precious tapa cloth map, or of the possibility that she who had cut the schooner adrift might also have robbed him of the treasure. His back was turned toward the rifled desk as he sat and leered and leered.

A hot flush of shame poured over Tolo's chilled body. She strove to pluck away the scant garment that stuck to her, accentuating her nakedness.

"Now look here, little one!" said Clintock, his harsh voice cracking as he strove to make his tones wheedling and persuasive. "No use you being discouraged. You've been helping that swab of a Lathrop because you don't know him like I do. He's nothing to you. You just kind of sign on your interest with me, and say, there's no telling all the good things I'll do for you!"

"Unlock that door!" said Tolo sternly, pointing.

Clintock shook his head and grinned a horrid, triumphant grimace.

"Now, now!" he reproved, trying to be playful. "I hain't going to eat you!"

He rose, came across the floor, and stood beside her. He laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder, transferred it to her chin, and tried to tilt her unwilling face up to his. Tolo screamed and started to struggle out of the transom seat. Clintock, with a harsh laugh, threw a thick arm about her and crushed her to him.

Again she screamed, her frantic voice falling futilely upon the narrow cabin walls. With both her hands clasped in one of his, Clintock held her in a fierce embrace, his hot breath pouring noisomely along her neck and shoulder.

Something thudded softly against the

side of the schooner, and Clintock jerked his head about in quick alarm. Tolo almost tore free of his grasp. Her voice of terror again shrilled through the cabin.

Naked feet pounded swiftly across the deck. Some one rattled at the cabin door.

"Jim! Jim!" Tolo screamed. "In here! He locked the door! Jim!"

Again and again she called for Jim. There was no one else to call for.

A voice spoke through the panels of the cabin door—Jim Lathrop's voice:

"Open up that door, Gaff Clintock!"

Clintock released his grasp upon Tolo and sprang for the head of his bunk. From beneath the pillow he was just withdrawing a heavy revolver in a leather holster, when the thin deal boards of the door came crashing in, and Jim Lathrop flung himself upon the skipper.

Brief was the struggle. His back bent over the edge of the bunk, Gaff Clintock lay staring up at Lathrop, the hand of the latter clutching him by the throat.

"Hurry, Tolo!" said Jim over his shoulder. "The dory! I tied it to the foot of the sea ladder."

When Tolo began to expostulate, Jim sternly ordered her to do as she was told.

"You don't know Gaff Clintock, Tolo! I could tell you—but hurry! Some day I'll come and see you, Tolo."

"Why not come now?" she asked, her voice tremulous.

"No—the jig is up, for now. I've come back to the ship to give myself up. I watched and listened. I saw the riding lights of the ship begin to move. I couldn't see, but I heard and understood, when they picked you up out of the water. I swam to your dory, put the plug back in, rowed it ashore, and emptied it out. Then I rowed here fast as ever I could. I know Gaff Clintock!"

"Jim, I'll point that gun at him, and you get in the dory, and then I'll—"

"Hurry, Tolo! Do as I say! Get ashore fast as you can. The men will be coming. Hurry!"

"Some day you'll come to me, Jim?"

"Yes. Hurry!"

She gave Jim a lingering look over her shoulder as he stood bent over Clintock, to whom he still clung with gripping hands. She walked across the deck, climbed down the sea ladder, and rowed toward shore. She beached the dory and went slowly up the trail to her cabin.

When she had nearly gained the cabin, she came to a sudden stop. Some one on board the schooner was blowing the fog-horn in short, staccato blasts. This would be a signal to the men who were still on the island.

The signal was repeated, and shortly she heard the men assembling upon the beach. Then the work boat rowed out. Tackle creaked. The anchor heaved up. The schooner paid off, heeled to the breeze, started on its way toward Seattle.

Jim Lathrop had given himself up. The voyage had been resumed. The whole status of affairs was just as it had been before his escape—save for one exceedingly important detail which, in the tumult, Gaff Clintock had overlooked. The precious tapa cloth map no longer rested in the cubby hole in the desk.

VI

Tolo lifted a hand and extracted the tapa cloth map from the masses of her hair. She entered her cabin and lighted a lamp. The little chart was intact and unharmed, its nail-scratch writing and figures as legible as on the day when old Metua made them.

For some moments Tolo stood studying the outlines of the map. Rudely drawn, it yet seemed remarkably specific—the location of certain clumps of palms, here a boulder, there the meander line of the beach, and then a cross mark in some scratches indicating just where, in the pandanus thicket, the gems were hidden. It seemed to Tolo that any one, in possession of the chart, once locating the village on Panang Island, could scarcely fail to follow its clear pointings.

She folded up the map and replaced it in her hair. Her glance fell upon Jim's shoes, which, in his haste, he had left standing upon the cabin floor. She lifted the heavy sea boots, carried them into her own room, and placed them in the closet. Upon that remote day when the young sailor should come to see her, as he had promised, she would give them to him.

Returning to the living room, she climbed upon a chair and took down the cracked teapot. Her treasure was there—every penny of the one hundred and five dollars and sixty-seven cents.

The money littering the table, Tolo stood before it deep in thought. From her hair she again removed the tapa cloth map.

Upon the wall of the cabin hung an advertising map of the world. She walked over to it and placed her finger on the tiny pin points that marked the San Juan Islands of Puget Sound. From Victoria, on Vancouver Island, she traced the ocean trails marked in red—two thousand miles to Honolulu, nearly another two thousand to Tahiti and Panang.

With a sudden gesture of resolution, she ran to her room and returned with a clean handkerchief. She poured the one hundred and five dollars into the center of the handkerchief, gathered the corners, and tied them about the money. Hurriedly she changed to her best dress and flung a few things into an ancient, battered grip. Upon a scrap of paper she wrote a note to her father, which she pinned in a conspicuous place. Then she ran down the trail, thrust the dory into the water, clambered in, and rowed steadily away in the darkness toward Victoria.

VII

TOWARD evening of the following day, a rather smart launch put in at the little bay before Tolo's cabin. A tiny dinghy swung down from the davits and a tall, good-looking young man, painfully dressed in new and too tight clothing, rowed ashore. He ran up the trail, called, and pulled open the door of the cabin. Breathing hard, his eyes a trifle wild, he entered.

With an exclamation of fear he ran to the note that Tolo had left pinned upon the wall:

DEAR DAD:

I've gone away on a treasure hunt. I'll be gone quite a while. I'll be all right. Don't worry. Affectionately, your daughter,

TOLO.

Gone away on a treasure hunt! The young man picked up the cracked teapot, which stood upon the table, and gave it a shake. Holding the pot in his hand, he began looking about the floor. Then he laid down the teapot and crossed to the door that opened into Tolo's room. Timorously, abashed, he entered.

A glad cry issued from the room, and the intruder emerged, clutching to his breast the pair of old sea boots.

Again he read the note pinned to the wall. He turned, ran out of the cabin, and dashed down the trail toward his dinghy, shouting to the man on the launch to get the engine started.

Threatening the integrity of the oarlocks, the young man rowed frantically to the launch—which was already moving—and swung the dinghy aboard.

"For Victoria, as fast as the tub will make it!" he shouted. "Give her all she's got! Wing her out!"

Away sped the launch. It finally turned into the estuary at Victoria. Black smoke was rolling from the funnels of a big liner that lay at the dock. The launch came to a stop beside the float, and the young man rushed up the incline. Passengers were passing through the turnstile and crossing the gangway to the liner's deck.

The young man caught sight of a little figure in a shabby dress. He plunged into the crowd, seized her by the arm, and detached her from the battered grip that she carried.

"Jim! You? I was going to Panang to get your pearls, Jim!"

"You're going to Seattle, instead," said Jim Lathrop. "Come on! I got a hired launch. Come on, Tolo, little matey!"

"Tolo, little matey!" What an infinity of tenderness he contrived to express in the simple, homely words!

The girl gave him a smile. Then, suddenly, she hung back from his dragging grasp.

"I've got to get my ticket money back," she said.

Presently she emerged from the ticket booth, the money for her canceled reservation in her grasp. They hurried to the float and boarded Jim's hired launch. The craft headed out of the estuary and down the Straits of Fuca toward Seattle.

Jim, with his old sea boots resting upon the cabin floor beside him, sat grinning amiably at Tolo. He pointed rather vainly at his new and too tight suit, and at the shining new lemon-colored shoes upon his feet.

"Gaff Clintock just had to pay me off in Seattle," he explained. "Six hundred dollars! When the government inspector come aboard, looking for contraband booze and hop, I told him I demanded to be paid off, so Gaff had to. Anyway, him discovering the tapa cloth map was gone took all the breeze out of his spanker. When he paid me, I got some clothes and hired a launch, and here I am!"

Jim leaned toward Tolo and took her hands in his.

"Tolo, I want you to help me pick out

an engagement ring for a terrible nice girl. Watch here—watch close!”

He drew a heavy knife from his pocket and picked up the old sea boots. With the blade of the knife he began prying away at the heels. One after the other, they came away. Each heel had been hollowed out and nailed back in place. Within the hollows nestled nearly a double handful of pearls—marvelous, wonderful, perfect gems.

As Jim held the glittering array toward her, Tolo cried out:

“Jim, you had the pearls all the time! You made all that fuss over the map to fool Gaff Clintock! It fooled me, too.”

“Just so,” agreed Jim; “but that there engagement ring—what one of these pearls

do you think would suit a girl that’s going to get engaged?”

Tolo bent over the pearls. With the tip of her finger she stirred them about in Jim’s wide palm.

“If I only knew the girl!” she said, her voice catching a trifle.

“Know her! What, don’t you know her?”

Jim laid the pearls carefully upon the transom. Then he put both his arms about Tolo and drew her to him.

“Why, it’s you, Tolo,” he whispered.

“I just bet you knowed it was you all the time,” he added untactfully.

Tolo shook her head.

“I just hoped,” she said; “but I never knew, till now!”

BALLADE OF DRYADS AND FAUNS

APRIL at last! Now we are free
To love again; the weary snows
Vanish, and earth, as glad as we,
Again is dreaming of the rose.
From Paradise the west wind blows;
Bright emerald flash the upland lawns.
Soon we shall take the path that goes
Back to the dryads and the fauns.

How good it is young buds to see!
How glad the little river flows!
How blithe the birds in every tree!
For every little creature knows
Winter is gone, and saucy crows
Shatter the hush of crystal dawns;
Oh, run with me on twinkling toes
Back to the dryads and the fauns!

Soon, sweetheart, you and I shall be
Where the soft moss its mantle throws,
In indolent felicity,
Sans petticoat and bare of hose,
There in some secret woodland close
Known but to fays and leprechauns
You shall forget your city beaux—
Back to the dryads and the fauns!

ENVOI

Dear, gone is winter with his woes;
No more are we the helpless pawns
Of wind and weather—horrid foes!
Back to the dryads and the fauns!

Richard Leigh

Here's the Very Note

A STORY OF TWO SISTERS WHOSE DOMESTIC EXISTENCE
WAS NOT AT ALL LIKE THAT OF THE PROVERBIAL
BIRDS IN THEIR LITTLE NEST

By Rosamund Gordon

THE seat on the aisle, fourth row, is yours, and this is a comedy-drama in four acts. It's about Pat, who is a girl—or, rather, *some* girl.

They named her Patricia when she was weeny and puny; but as soon as they took her off mother's milk and gave her stuff out of a can, she began to run true to form. She gained even more rapidly than the advertisement promised, until she looked like the picture on the can itself. As she grew older, her parents soon saw that Patricia was not just the name for a rollicking husky who would sooner jump a fence than click a gate.

In school, where her plumpness was worn off playing leap frog and baseball, all her friends called her "Pat." At home, too, the name fitted. It could be called more easily; and some one was always wanting something of Pat.

"Pat, will you do this?"

"Pat, have you done that?"

"Pat, where in the world—"

Pat's sister, however, sometimes called her "Patreeshya." Pat's sister was so unlike Pat that you wouldn't have believed they were even distantly related. Edith—Edythe, I should say, for she changed the spelling as soon as she got hep to herself and her line—had the manner of a princess, laboriously acquired and perfectly executed. She had the languor of slow movies—each gesture a picture. Edythe aimed to please—that is, to please the men.

I don't have to tell you how she looks, for you must know; but just to make sure—no, she hasn't bobbed hair. It's black, and she coils it smoothly, gently, low and sleek over her ears, into a soft knot at the nape of her white neck; and the weight of it seems to—oh, yes, you *do* know!

Their mother is a minor character, and she looks just as Edythe will look in twenty years—care-worn, weary, with a tight, droopy mouth and ineffectual hands.

And in that queer way that makes life one incomprehensible thing after another, Pat and her mother are as proud as bootleggers of Edythe, who adroitly tyrannizes over them. She can have their shirts—and does have their silk ones. Mrs. Palmer takes over Edythe's share of the housework, and Pat teaches gymnasium at the Y. W. C. A., for Edythe's additional comforts.

Of course, Edythe isn't very well. She admits it herself, without any cross-questioning. In the first place, she has neuralgia in her arms. It's positively dangerous for her to put her hands in water—in dishwater, that is. And if she stoops to dust—"My dear, really, I could barely rise—really!" And yet Edythe can dance half the night, held close in that crazy new position in vogue this last week, which makes the letter Z out of an otherwise perfect back.

All of which is, I think, rather snappy preliminary for the drawing aside of the curtain on the first act. Good taste ought to keep me from pulling the silken cord this minute, because they are scrapping. It's a good scrap, however, and a typical one; so settle back—you're in on it.

The living room of the Palmer ménage is like most apartment house living rooms. In other words, it's a replica of any good furniture store window, except that here we have people, some sagging springs, curled edges on the magazines, and all plaster walls, instead of one glass one.

Edythe is stretched out on the davenport in a graceful pose. Her hands, under her head, are easing the weight of it against the

black and gold pillow. She is clad in the picturesque comfort of a negligee which was once a kimono of Pat's. Upon appropriating it, Edythe promptly sewed it up the center, slashed it down the sides, added satin streamers and a few seductive rosebuds, and lo, it was a negligee.

Edythe is in the midst of a studied and detached indolence that is infuriating to a righteous faultfinder; and Pat is all of that.

Pat, our little heroine, is standing threateningly above her sister. Her brown Oxford-shod feet are placed sturdily apart, as if she were all set to throw a goal or a brick. In her straight brown jersey dress, with her short, wavy brown hair simply quivering with her angry gestures, and her arms lifted and ready for action, she looks as if she meant to pick inert, posed Edythe and thrash her into rag-doll limpness; but she doesn't. She speaks, instead.

"I don't care as much about the dress as I do about the way you sneaked it. Yes, that's the word—sneaked it! You wrote me a note about it, when you could have asked. You knew you had no right to it!"

Pat's voice has that lovely deep-toned quality that lifts with it even as it rises in anger. The echo of it swirls around the room after she has finished.

"Taking it before I got home from my classes, when I needed it to dress for the party I bought it for! Say something!" She stamped her foot. "Say something! Defend yourself!"

Pat shook a crumpled bit of paper, and started reading, controlling herself, slowing her words almost to Edythe's tempo of diction:

"Have borrowed your new dress, old dear. Simply had to have it. Will explain."

Edythe recrossed her legs on the davenport with careful deliberateness, and a smothered sigh of ennui ruffled her lips.

"Your motto seems to be, 'What you can't have, take'; and that's stealing, pure and simple!"

"Patreeshya" — the "tree" swelled high, and the "shya" breathed low in a most effective way—"Patreeshya, you"—

"Don't Patreeshya me! I—"

Mrs. Palmer hurried in from putting away the table silver. She was untying her apron strings in nervous little pulls, as if her apron took from her dignity, and as if her dignity was indispensable.

Edythe turned her head.

"Mother, isn't she nasty?"

"Now don't try to win mother over to your side by lying," protested Pat.

"Girls, girls!" Their mother had reached them, and was clapping her hands together in light little taps. "I'm ashamed of you, quarreling about something that is done with and over."

"Oh, mother, you always say that! That's why Edythe never changes. I have a right to be angry. She shouldn't"—the fury mounted again into Pat's voice—"shouldn't do such an underhand—"

"Pat, stop!" Edythe wedged in where her mother had forced entrance. "Mother, isn't she just—well, impossible, low?"

"Girls, girls!" Mrs. Palmer sank down unhappily into a winged chair next to the table, took a big breath, and started. "I have tried, ever since your father died—"

Lord, would they have to listen to that rigmarole again? The two sisters looked at each other with a despairing glance of mutual suffering. The whole blooming business wasn't worth it.

"Never mind, mother—we'll kiss and make up. Spare yourself." Pat came away from the couch, urging her mother to desist, a tired little smile about her lips. "The spasm's over."

But Mrs. Palmer was launched.

"I've worked so hard to bring you up—"

This was scarcely true. As a matter of fact, Pat was bringing up the family. She suspected it on such occasions as this, when she knew that she was being walked over; but she realized that some one had to give in, and her purpose sustained her. She had promised dad—oh, not at one of those tearful deathbed scenes; there had been just a look between them, when he was past talking—just a look and a nod, and Pat had taken on the family.

"It makes me ill when you—"

"Never mind, mother—we're not so bad, after all. Just wait until I get my license to teach in high school, and then we can have duchess point lace handkerchiefs to wipe our noses on!"

Pat and her mother laughed at that, and Edythe joined in the chorus with a tinkly forced bit of treble sound. It was a family joke that Edythe used everything of everybody's; but her fastidiousness forced her into purchasing her own handkerchiefs.

"All right—laugh!" The furor over, Edythe roused herself into the discussion, leading off with a complaint. "It will be

perfectly glorious to have the proper kind of clothes to be really comfortable with my friends." It takes much less time to read that than it took Edythe to say it. Her words are carefully enunciated, as if she hated to tear herself away from each verbal pearl. "I haven't a thing to wear, not a thing!"

Mrs. Palmer's mild comeback was spoken like a phonograph record, as if the needle had run through the same grooves before.

"Your father left an annuity that should keep this family happy and comfortable. If you would only be satisfied! You"—she was directing her remarks to Edythe—"you are a lady of leisure, while Pat works—"

"Don't!" It was a nervous, staccato outburst. "Don't force that down my throat forever! If I could find something that so completely suited my temperament as Pat finds that ordering kids around a gymnasium suits hers, I'd work, too."

"Blah!"—this from Pat in no shy whisper.

"Girls, girls!"

"All right, mother—we'll call a truce. Another week, and vacations start; and with me safe at camp"—Pat's voice dropped down to its usual softness of tone—"and you two happily parading through a hotel lobby—"

"Pat"—her mother was worried—"do you really think we can afford the Sycamore, or should we go to a boarding house?"

"A boarding house? Mother!"

Edythe's voice held all the horror of the ages.

"I'll send my camp check along the first of the month," Pat promised. "That'll help. I don't need anything up there."

"Monty"—Edythe drawled the name with restraint—"Monty said last night that he would come up to the Sycamore for week-ends, all summer, if I'm there."

"I hope so," said her mother.

Monty had been dangling overlong. He was tall, blasé, and wordy; but he was the present catch who hadn't yet slipped the hook. Edythe was hopeful of country atmosphere, moons, and the lake. They had always been helpful. She really felt that she did her best work in the summer. She was all for the great open spaces. A living room was confining.

"And Monty says that he knows some lovely men who go up there for golf!"

Edythe had forgotten to pose, she was so excited.

Pat was thumbing her way through a magazine, bored.

"Don't vamp them all at once, old dear!" she threw in.

"Don't get fresh!"

"Girls, girls!"

"She's jealous, mother."

"Of the samples you bring around here?" inquired Pat.

"You don't know what it is to have a man look at you as if he wanted to talk to you," retorted Edythe, going so far as to swing her feet to the ground to say it.

"If the slinty-eyed way they look at you"—Pat didn't even turn her head from the page—"is any compliment, then deliver me!"

"Why, you little—"

"Girls, girls! I really—" pleaded their mother, near to tears.

"At it again, aren't we? I'll be good," Pat promised, ashamed.

Edythe watched the pink blush mount her sister's cheeks.

"Patreeshya, do you need that evening dress up at a rough camp—the one that you made all this fuss about? I really must have another dress, somehow. Can't I just take it with me?"

"Yes—take it," Pat briefly answered.

They couldn't see the gulp rising to Pat's throat, and didn't hear it when she swallowed it—a big hard lump. That evening dress was such a pretty one! She had bought it at a bargain, and in the long store mirror it had looked unbelievably lovely on her. The salesgirls had stood around and gushed. Pat's brown eyes had darted happy lights above the fluffy flame-colored chiffon. With her head, with its curly short hair, ducked to the side, and her red lips pursed into a contemplative circle, she knew that she was pretty; and it was a pleasant feeling to be pretty—not just useful and efficient and athletic, but pretty.

Then, when she came home to dress in the flame-colored chiffon for the club party, Edythe had gone off with it. Of course, it didn't much matter, with only girls there. Edythe had used it for a more festive affair, Pat guessed.

"Oh, thanks, Patreeshya, thanks!"

"Don't mention it." Pat's voice was a bit husky. "But if you ever leave me another note, about anything," she said between her teeth, shaking a warning finger

almost under Edythe's nose—"a note, hear me, about anything, while you can still talk, I'll surely—"

"Girls, girls!"

"Mother, isn't she—"

II

THE next act is in three short scenes. The first is a tableau effect—you know, the kind they use with a shimmering screen before it.

There Pat is, then, dressed in knickers and khaki shirt, standing before her tent in the early morning. She is not posing. Every one else is asleep, and there is no one to see her. Out of a sudden wealth of feeling for the rising sun and all its concurrent beauties, her arms are upflung and her head thrown back.

All the ardor that Edythe puts into the shaping of her lips before the mirror are but a pinch of the feelings that crowd through Pat at this moment. What petting parties are to Edythe, diving from a high board, with a quick lift and a swift, straight drop into blue-green waters below, is to Pat.

I give it as a scene because it is typical of Pat and her appreciations.

The summer hurried through, as only summers do. Edythe never wrote to Pat, for she was much too busy; but mother sent little notes. She asked about the check, and told Pat that Edythe was having a lovely time. In fact, she was the most popular girl at the resort; but nothing definite had come of it yet. Mother was hopeful, though.

Then Labor Day came, with the breaking up of camp and the packing and hurrying away in the early morning. One of Pat's tent charges, whose brother had a car, and was to come for her, invited Pat to drive home with them. Pat accepted, for it was an easier and pleasanter way of getting back to the city, with its streets and its clangings.

That was how Pat met Jim West. He was the brother with the car. He was a pleasant-looking fellow about Pat's age, fresh from college—that is, he was only a year or so out of college.

Jim didn't look like the impressive young orators in the advertisements which inform you that "you can be a public speaker, too," but he had his own quiet way of saying things in crisp, short, precise words.

His eyes were blue, and had a jolly little twinkle in them.

Oh, Pat and Jim hit it off from the first instant! He hustled them into the car, ordering the little girls and Pat around in an easy, effective way. He asked Pat to ride in front with him—which brings us to the next scene.

Jim had been in charge of swimming at a boys' camp all summer, and the talk swung easily between them. When Jim found that it did, he confessed, a bit shyly, that as a rule he didn't much like girls. When Pat admitted that she could never wax enthusiastic about form-fit clothes men, the conversation hurried back into talk of the summer and plans for the winter.

They had the same ideas about things. Their sentences dovetailed.

"It'll be terrible—"

"Yes, and the subway! We tried to picture it on a hike once, and got a lot of fun out of it—"

"Uh-uh—just glad at being so far away from it. Oh, see those trees in the valley! The leaves are just beginning to—"

"Yes, and it hurts when they really fall in big swirls."

"Let's hike some day real soon, when the leaves are—you know—"

"Almost crumbly under foot, and knee-deep. Start early—"

"Yes, on a gray, coldish day."

"A high wind blowing—"

"We'll take a can of beans—"

"And bacon—"

"And apples—"

And so they rode gayly along. Love at first sight? Perhaps. Anyhow, they were so fully aware of the happy coincidence of their compatibility that during silences they were sheepishly grinning because of the last congenial exchange of words—the brief, inadequate connotation of their common interests.

They reached the city quite late. The children in the car were nearly asleep and very tired. Jim had time only to carry Pat's bags to the apartment door.

Edythe, hearing the smack of the bags against the tiled floor of the hall, and hearing the low rumble of a man's voice, came to open the door, to see; but Jim was off before the turn of the knob, with a quick—

"Coming to-morrow night, if I may. Be home, will you, Pat?"

Pat nodded, and they clasped hands, self-conscious for the first time.

"Welcome home, prodigal one! Why the gaping mouth?" Edythe helped Pat with the bags by lifting Pat's hat and hanging it on the foyer rack. "And Patreesha, who in the world was the burly escort? Has our tomboy a beau?"

"How brown you are, Pat!" said her mother. "And so late! Not a thing in the house for you to eat, either. What in the world shall we do? I asked Edythe to run out and get something; but she has a headache, and so—"

III

THREE months have elapsed when the curtain rises for the third act. The time is winter, and the scene is the living room of the Palmer apartment.

Edythe is cozily tucked into one corner of the davenport, reading a best-seller. There are two new rosy lamps, and the gas logs are burning with a near-real fervor. Mrs. Palmer is knitting an edge on a guest towel.

"Somehow, Edythe, I don't feel quite right about Pat taking on those evening classes. Really we didn't need new coats this winter; and her father never wanted his daughters to work. We never should have stayed at that hotel all those weeks, either. The extras were frightful; and you didn't have such a wonderful time. None of those men have been here since—not a single one. And what ever happened to Monty?"

"Mother, please don't mention Monty to me! He's a fourflusher. You needn't worry about Pat. It isn't work for her—it's fun. We do need coats. I certainly do. By the way"—from Edythe's manner of saying it any one but a mother would have known that it wasn't "by the way" at all—"Jim West called up just after Pat left for her class, and I suggested that he should come here to wait for Pat. It's too cold to-night to park outside the Y. W. C. A. stage entrance."

"I hope Pat gets here soon, then. I don't think he's comfortable waiting here without her. He's so shy!"

"H-m! He was at first. He's getting over it now."

The bell rings. Mrs. Palmer opens the foyer door, and Jim West walks in, beaming, spruced up, eager.

"Good evening! Pat here yet?"

"No—not just yet," replied her mother.

"But you said—"

"Yes, but she's evidently been delayed."

Edythe stretches a leg forward and rises languidly from her cuddly informal position, lifting her eyes, half closed from reading, to the young man.

"I'll have to play understudy for a while. Oh, sit right here—not away over there. Why, you'll be lonely over on that side of the room, all alone!"

Jim edges upon the couch, nervous, self-conscious. He clears his throat and talks.

"It's a wonderful night for a long walk. There's just enough snow to crunch under your heels. Bully feeling, that!"

"Think so? And I think it's a wonderful night"—Edythe dropped her head slowly back against the pillow, her voice slow, low, and dreamy—"a perfect night to watch the fire, dream, and"—she bent forward, to put a hand on his arm—"oh, no, that's all right! You're not on my foot."

You know Edythe well enough to fill in this touching scene until Pat comes.

When Pat slams the outer door, Jim and Edythe jump as if shot. Jim really didn't know how Edythe's head had nestled down upon his coat lapel, she was so clever.

"Hello, there, Jim!"

Pat's voice is quivering with a splendid expectancy. She comes to the door and stands there—snow on the edges of her hair, all flurried and disarranged; her middy blouse not quite trim and white enough; her tie askant and rumpled, her skirt wind-blown. She carries with her the cold air from outdoors; and at that moment it doesn't fit.

"Hello, Pat!"

Jim's voice is strange, as if waking from a dream.

"Hello!"

"Hello," Edythe says quietly.

And that is all they seem to be able to say.

Of course, the evening pushes through. Edythe excuses herself in a masterly fashion. She rises with slow indolence, exquisite, delicate-looking, in her clinging gown of green, shimmering silk. She walks quite close to Pat as she says good night. As they stand together, they don't look like sisters, and both of them know it.

Jim's eyes follow Edythe to the portières, and the rest of him almost follows as she drops them behind her.

"Why, Jim!" Pat's voice is hearty. "What is the matter with us to-night?"

They both try bravely to get back into talking in their old companionable way, but they can't. Jim seems to have to jerk himself into conversation. Pat's mind will run off into wondering, wondering—catching at an idea, a suspicion, and then throwing it away as unworthy.

"Jim, I think you're just plain sleepy; and I'm cross. Those girls at school were stupid to-night. You go home, and get your beauty sleep."

She hurries him out, as if afraid of his mood.

"I'll call for you to-morrow night at school, Pat. That 'll be better; and we'll walk—oh, miles! The snow will hold."

He was making a brave attempt to come back.

"Do, and let's!"

Pat makes a playful bang at his hat, as she always does.

"At school then, to-morrow night," he says, with a tired grin.

"Right-o!"

And Jim is gone.

Pat stands looking at the burning logs.

"Worrying?"

Edythe has come into the room so softly that Pat hasn't heard her. She is dressed just as she was when she left the room; the accurate inference being that she has been listening behind the curtains. She has the smug air of a star performer exchanging professional talk with one of the chorus.

"Changed your mind as to what an admiring glance is worth?"

Pat doesn't answer. She leans down and turns the gas logs down slowly, until they flicker and finally go out with a loud puff.

Edythe moves nearer, taking hairpins from her hair with rhythmic assurance.

"He's almost too easy!"

Pat rises with an air of such terrific restraint that it seems as if it couldn't hold another hairpin's worth. Her voice is banked fire.

"Too easy to what?" she asks.

"Too easy to get."

"You mean to take, don't you?"

Edythe allows her long hair to fall, and helpfully shakes it back with a sigh of relief, as if to say:

"Oh, what a weight!"

"You know what I think of your methods," Pat adds.

Edythe turns to retire. She has said about all she cares to say. She certainly didn't come out into the living room to be insulted. She holds all the aces, anyhow.

"I simply advise you not to get too fresh, and not to look so blowsy," she tells Pat. "Take a tip from me—"

"Don't give me any tips!" Pat says it through almost closed lips. "Take what you can get!"

Edythe turns at the doorway.

"Do you mean it?"

"I always mean what I say."

"You will regret saying that, old dear!"

And Edythe hurries from the room, as if afraid of being jumped on from behind.

She needn't have worried, however, for Pat is too deep in herself. She walks around the room in a sort of self-seeking trance.

"I do wonder!" she keeps saying. "I do wonder!"

Pat starts pulling the chains of the rosy lamps. As the air in the room cools and darkens, and the curtain starts to fall, Pat calls out, her usually rounded tones but thinly varnishing her eagerness:

"Edythe, that party dress of mine—has it any life left in it?"

From far down the hall comes Edythe's sleepy answer:

"Some. You can have it. I'm making a new one—green. Your friend seems to like green."

IV

It is three weeks later. The war of the sisters is on; and Edythe is winning all the skirmishes. Of course, she is better prepared, having had plenty of target practice and of hand-to-hand encounters. Her positions have always been strategic—carefully thought out.

Don't reach for your hats, and start scanning time tables! The curtain is now swishing back on the last act, disclosing the battlefield—the Palmer living room.

Pat walks in slowly, a bit of white paper in her hand. She is alone in the apartment. Her mother is away, visiting a sick cousin. She is dressed in the flame-colored chiffon party dress. The party dress droops; and, inside of it, Pat droops, too.

She is crying. An occasional gulp and periodic eye dabs prove it. She reads the note over slowly:

We're going off together. Eloping is better than a fuss. Easier for you, too, poor dear.

Pat walks over and sits on the edge of a chair, staring, dumb.

"I can almost hear her saying 'Patreeshya,'" she thought.

Just then the doorbell begins to ring, in quick jabs. It rings six, eight, ten times before Pat can fly to it.

You hear them coming down the hall, and a man's voice rising and falling. Into the room comes Jim West, almost incoherent, almost carrying Pat with his arm around her, pacing her steps to his enormous, excited strides.

"Why, Pat, she told me she had written and said that it was all right! 'What's all right?' I asked her, and then, why, hell—excuse me!—it jerked me up like a tight bit. It showed me where I was going"—Jim snapped his fingers—"like that! She planned it ahead of time, that note, with no word of say so from me. Why, I never! Mad?"

They reached the center of the room. Jim still has his hat on, and he waves his arms, as if winding up to talk faster.

Pat stands before him, beaming, all quivery.

"Why, I've just been nice to her, because she's your sister, and all that; and she did have a way. I didn't realize, Pat, honest—"

"Of course you didn't!"

"Came to me all of a sudden when she told me about the note. I—"

"What did you say?"

"I said plenty. She tried to work too fast, that's what!"

"She's good at it," remarks Pat.

"Too damned—excuse me!—too good, I mean."

They laugh at that—although Pat's laugh is half and half.

"Run along now, Pat, and get ready!"

"Get ready, Jim—for what?"

But she knows, and starts for the exit with a little happy run.

"This will be a first-class elopement, to celebrate my narrow escape. Pack, quick—just a toothbrush and a sweater! We're—"

Pat turns at the door.

"Oh, Jim!"

"Pat!" He's at the door, just as fast as that—a perfect flying tackle; but his voice is soft and low. "I love you!"

"Of course you do, and I—"

There's a touching little close-up right here. It's really too bad that you can't see it.

"I don't think any elopement is complete without a note. Have you a pencil, Jim?"

"Yes."

He dives for one in his vest pocket.

"I have a bit of paper." Pat has unclenched her fist for the first time since the doorbell rang. "I can use the other side."

"Use me for a desk!"

Jim crooks his back into leapfrog position. Pat moistens the point of her pencil in joyous contemplation, and reads aloud as she writes:

"I'm not taking anything of yours, old dear. Jim and I are eloping. We didn't want the fuss of a full regalia wedding. I must add a little tip in parting—"

The slanting table shakes.

"Keep still, Jim! She won't be able to read it, if you aren't."

"Tell her to try to be a regular feller. This vamping stuff doesn't wear well!"

Pat goes on with her note:

"Try outdoor hiking with Monty. Jim says languor and drooping eyelids pall."

"What are you writing now, Pat? The strain is terrible!"

"I'm signing my name 'Patreeshya.'"

MY TRIBUTE

For your youth given to me
I give you this—
All that the soul can see
In a kiss;

All that the heart can dream,
Or lips can know;
All that the south winds seem
When they blow,

William A. Drake

Fathomless

THE ARCTIC VOYAGE OF THE BARK AURORA, AND THE SECRET OF THE TREASURE UNDER THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

By Captain Dingle

Author of "Wide Waters," "The Age-Old Kingdom," etc.

THE bark Aurora is on a cruise to the arctic, the object of which has been kept a secret. Ben Muras, her skipper, is planning to recover a cargo of costly furs that was cached in the far north when the ship Ptarmigan was wrecked. Toivo Ranta, the Finnish boatswain, has another idea. He owns a magic knife, with five significant notches in its handle. He believes that when the knife shall have nine notches—that is, when it shall have killed nine men—its owner will find the priceless treasure of the Aare Hauta, which lies under the northern lights.

Captain Muras's officers are Mr. Soler, first mate, and Mr. Coles, second mate. The ship's company includes two incongruous members—Peg Boulter, a girl who hopes to get a share of any treasure that may be found, and Sam Hewes, better known as Salvation Sam, preacher at a waterside mission.

A sixth notch appears on Toivo Ranta's knife when a sailor, Poke Bonnet, is mysteriously murdered; and this crime is soon followed by another, for Captain Muras is found lying in his bunk, near death from a deep stab in the chest.

VIII

SAILOR after sailor was dragged in review before the wounded captain, who wagged his head with fast failing strength, but in whose terrible eyes the light of intelligence still blazed.

"Hurry up! He's goin' off again," snapped Peggy.

The dark wet stain suddenly spread with brighter red, and her hand was red, too. From the tumbler in her hand she drank a sip of the rum, to stave off the nausea which assailed her. The mate was hauling Tyke Colomb forward, and men who had been scrutinized pushed in those who had not. Pineo and Lute Slade were huddled behind Tyke, whose hangdog face had the look of a cornered wolf.

"Now you been an' sent him off again with yer crowdin'!" shrilled Peg, hurling down the tumbler and ripping open the skipper's shirt. "Git out, all of yer! This is a woman's job. You been used to jails, 'stead of hospitals. Git out, I tell yer!"

"Let me look at the wound, Peggy," Salvation Sam said quietly, with a gentle touch on the girl's shoulder.

"Get out!" said the mate.

The men obeyed him with alacrity, leav-

ing Muras in the only hands that could ease his hurt. Salvation Sam sniffed his disapproval, peering for a brief instant into the girl's colorful face. Pineo waited until the mate and the seamen had gone. Then he appeared in the cabin doorway.

"I know how to fix that sort o' thing, parson," he said softly. "You take the gal out. She's all upset. I'll look after Muras."

Salvation Sam half turned, to tell Peggy that she need not stay with the captain. Pineo stepped forward. Muras's eyes were shut now; but as the steward bent over him, they flickered open again, and a choking effort at expression whistled through the clenched teeth.

"I'll get some hot water," said Pineo, and went out in haste.

He stayed away while Salvation Sam and Peggy washed and bandaged the gaping wound. Sam shaved the wiry hair from Muras's chest, trying to spare Peg's modesty by keeping between her and the bared breast; but Peg needed no such protection. She pushed her way in close, and it was not mere inquisitiveness regarding a man's naked torso that impelled her, either. She stared narrowly at the clean, wide gash that was being drawn together by the needle

and the linen thread in the inexpert but tender hands of the missionary.

She had been shaken by the tragic incidents of the voyage, and her nerves were on edge. The strong rum she had taken gave a false and exaggerated lightness to her perceptions. Her imagination was becoming frothy, too. She giggled as Sam pinched together the cleaned lips of the wound. He chided her.

"Oh, take a pill!" she snapped, and giggled again. "Just like your old bishop's mug, that is!"

Peggy sat down plump on the low settee beside the bunk, and rocked with hysterical laughter. She pointed wordlessly, unable to do more, in answer to Sam's shocked glance.

There was, though Salvation Sam could not be expected to see it, a decided resemblance to a caricatured human visage in the shaven portion of the skipper's breast, with the circle of whiskerlike hair surrounding the clean patch and the wide, mouthlike lips that the knife had made. Perhaps Peggy was unkind to the missionary, but she was overwrought. Sam knew that, and went on with his surgery until the patient lay breathing more easily, clothed in fresh linen, his eyes at last shut in healing sleep.

"Now, my dear," Sam said softly, "go to your bed. I'll watch over him awhile."

He laid a kindly hand upon her tumbled hair, for her small head was bowed wearily after her unnatural hilarity. At his touch she sprang up.

"Go to bed yourself! I been snoozin'," she said. "I'm lookin' after Muras. I got a reason. Didn't you see anything queer about that stab, Sam?"

"Yes, yes, Peggy; but you shouldn't make fun of the bishop."

"Damn the bishop! Here—look!"

Peg pounced upon Muras and swiftly opened the breast of his shirt, before Sam could gather wits to stop her. She laid bare the wound by the effective means of tearing off the adhesive-strapped pad which Sam had just placed there.

Sam Hewes's kindly eyes blazed, and his deep-lined, haggard face registered as near anger as ever it had. He gripped her hand fiercely, but she pointed with the free hand, looking up into his face.

"That was never done with Toivo's magic knife!" she cried.

Sam's brows lowered in troubled fashion. While ministering to the wounded man's

hurt, the mystery of the attempted murder had gone out of his mind. He had scarcely thought of Toivo as the assailant; but it was true that Toivo's notorious knife had been found reddened with fresh blood, and with a new notch cut in the handle.

"But how can you tell?" he asked. "The knife was found in Toivo's sheath, and—"

"I know—Soler said so. Don't make any difference. I know that knife, Sam. I had it in my hands lots o' times. Good reason I should know it. The knife as dug that hole in Muras was twice as wide in the blade as the Finn's sticker."

As expertly as Sam had done, Peggy replaced the pad over the wound; but her eyes were bright with excitement. There was a subdued sound in the saloon, and she ran to the cabin door, to peer through the shadows. Nobody was there.

She stood in the doorway and warned Sam:

"I've took on this job, Sam, so you mind me. Don't let nobody but you and me go nigh Muras, neither to touch him nor to feed him anything, see? I got a hunch. You call me in two hours, Sam."

"Is your heart responding to—" Sam suggested with a wavering smile.

Peg stared at him, round-eyed.

"Heart? Me? Him?" she stuttered. "Phit!" she spat, and left him, slamming the door behind her with no regard for the laws of behavior governing sick chambers.

There was a heavy quality about the bark and all her business. There was a brooding, uneasy air about her men. The mate now believed that Muras would recover; and there seemed small doubt that when he recovered the man who knifed him would be found.

In Mr. Soler's mind, Toivo's guilt needed no further proof; yet Muras had emphatically negatived it. Moreover, the Finn had coolly taken back his knife, wrenching it from the mate's grasp, ignoring all orders that concerned his precious blade with the calm earnestness which marked his obedience to all orders concerning the ship's business.

"If I was master, I'd show him!" grumbled Mr. Coles.

"If you was master, you'd play hell!" retorted the first mate peevishly.

"Runnin' the ship his own sweet way!" muttered Coles.

"Who else knows where to run her? Muras ain't well yet."

"Is he goin' to get well, think?" The second mate looked worried. He was not as chubby as of yore. He had not been built or modeled for an officer's berth on a mystery ship such as the *Aurora* was proving to be. "He looked about cooked, to me. That Finn ought to be clapped into the rattle, mister!"

"You stand your watch, skoff your grub, and smoke your pipe." Mr. Soler laughed wisely. "Muras 'll get well—don't worry. If I thought he wouldn't, I'd nab the Finn and put back for home; but he will, what with Salvation Sam and the wench. The parson's savin' his body to have a cut at his soul, and the gal's makin' sure of it because she's stuck on him. They won't let even the stooard go near him."

"Oh!" grunted Mr. Coles, and turned to his duty.

As for the *Aurora*, she pushed her way stolidly through the glittering ice, which roared and swelled and burst at her bows. The breeze was fresh and the skies steely blue, with a sharp tang of increasing frost in the air. Lacking orders, Mr. Soler kept her going along on the last course set. Far, far away ahead loomed an indistinct line which might be solid ice or ice-clad land.

Toivo knelt at the grindstone beside the carpenter's bench, putting a fresh edge on his knife. He was absorbed in the task. Young Lute Slade, turning the stone for him, regarded his bowed blond head with mystified gravity.

"Don't turn so fast. Yu will make ta steel hot," muttered Toivo.

There was a dark stain still covering the blade, and the water running over it did not seem to soften the dried blood. Lute shivered, turned, and kept silent.

Other men, at their jobs about the decks, glanced fearfully at the Finn and murmured together. Tyke Colomb, compelled to pass the grindstone to get a marline spike from the locker, cursed under his breath, and looked at the bowed head as if he would like to try the temper of the marline spike upon it. He almost ran back to his job when Toivo suddenly rose to his feet with gleaming eyes, and tried the edge of his blade with a broad thumb crisscrossed with tiny cuts.

"I don't like this ship, I don't!" whined Raupo, at the forecabin dinner. "Somepin

rocky about it—that there is. A feller ain't safe!"

"I knowed we wuzn't arter no good when we signed fer double wages," rejoined Eke Paral. "A sky pilot aboard, too!"

"An' a bloodsuckin' wench!"

"Aye, but that Finn!" burst from another sailor, who was gulping hot pea soup as if he feared that he might not get it down before something terrible happened to him.

In the galley, the doctor complained to Chips, his crony, that his work was knocked endwise, and that he never knew whether he stood on his truck or his keel.

"Stooard don't issue no stores, nor he don't make no bread," mourned the doctor. "Allus moochin' around the old man's cabin, he is. 'Tain't because he loves Murras, neither."

"Why, you old swab, he's sparkin' that brass-faced hussy, o' course," growled Chips contemptuously.

Of all the ship's company, Chips seemed to be the least unsettled by the air of portent oppressing the ship. While the doctor dished up the cabin dinner, he stole a slab of gingerbread. Then, as he shuffled along forward, to eat, he clapped the dish containing his own dinner and the boson's over the loot.

Peg presently appeared, running down the poop ladder and bumping into the doctor as he stood at his galley door waiting for the steward to come for his dishes.

"Let me in!" the girl said sharply.

She pushed in without waiting for leave. She carried a small saucepan and a spoon. The doctor glowered at her belligerently.

"Why don't the stooard fetch 'is dishes?" he demanded. "What do you want in here, any'ow?"

"Hold yer hush, old boy!" retorted Peg impudently. "You better take along the cabin grub, or you'll have the mate after yer scalp!"

She opened the stove and poked the fire, while the lord of the galley sputtered impotently. She put water and some beef cubes into her saucepan. Then she set the pan over the fire and began to stir.

"Pineo's all upset because o' the skipper," she said.

"'E's all upset because o' you, more likely!" growled the doctor.

"Now, now, deary!" Peg chided him with a shake of the head, still stirring her broth. "You shouldn't say such things to

me. What makes you think men would get upset on my account? Hurry along with the grub, like a good old feller, or else Mr. Soler 'll think I've upset you, too."

"You're upsettin' everybody!" snapped the harassed cook.

He gathered the dishes together with a crash, and staggered aft with them, as the mate appeared, angry-eyed, looking for his dinner at the cabin hatch.

In mid afternoon the breeze no longer forced the bark through the thickening ice. The sea outside the frozen surface had subsided to a calm, and the ice no longer moved, but lay as far as eye could reach, as level and as bright as a vast sheet of burnished steel. Clouds banked up to north and east—not wind clouds, but heavy, woolly masses of vapor which were full of snow. The wind filled the sails, but that was all. As if she had sailed into a mass of molten steel which gradually hardened around her, and at last imprisoned her, the Aurora came to a standstill, and the lane of broken ice through which she had come slowly froze astern of her.

"Get the sail off her!" said the mate savagely.

He had just been trying to get in to see Muras. While Salvation Sam watched, the mate could enter, for he had the right; but right made no difference to Peg Bolter. She permitted nobody to enter while she watched, and Mr. Soler was not hardened to the lashing of such a tongue as Peg's. He heard the diminishing sounds of progress from the cabin, and seized the excuse to retreat.

Briskly Toivo led the men around the fiterails and pinrails. They trooped after him sullenly, and not a man uttered a sound. Halyards were let go in silence. Clewlines, buntlines, and braces were manned and hauled without a yelp of song. Jibs and staysails rattled down to the pull of downhauls like the rattling of bones in a knacker's yard.

Salvation Sam stood on the poop, looking on dolefully. He was not wanted in the skipper's cabin for a while, and he could not rest, for the unrest of the ship was upon him. He wanted to speak with the men. It seemed a terrible thing that men should have been knifed—one to death, and another perilously near to death—without any serious attempt to discover the assassin. He was anxious to talk to the Finn.

There was something very strange about that Finn. Peggy said it was not Toivo's knife that stabbed Muras. It was very plain to see that the stab was twice as wide as the boatswain's blade; but Toivo's knife had been found in its sheath beside his bunk, and the blade was red and sticky. There were seven notches in the handle, where only six were the night before.

Salvation Sam waited for the boatswain to get aft. Mr. Coles saw him standing idle.

"Here, you Salvation!" he wheezed, holding out a rope. "Haul in on this! Hey, you at the wheel there! D'ye think you're steerin' the universe? Catch hold o' the spanker brails and brail her in!"

The second mate eased off the outhaul, and the parson and the helmsman crumpled the spanker in to the mast with the brails. Then they trimmed the boom by the sheet and guys and the gaff by the vangs, and coiled down the ropes. After which, Salvation Sam straightened up to seek Toivo, for the work was finished. The watch drifted back to loaf at their various jobs, and to wait for the bell to strike.

"Here, Sam—come here!" cried Peg shrilly, through the cabin skylight. "Stand by here a minute, will you?"

Sam entered the cabin. He found Pineo loitering near the skipper's door, in which stood Peg Bolter, with a towel in her hand, daring the steward to approach with the sheer fire in her eyes.

"Don't you let him go in!" she said to Sam. "I got to get something quick." As she flashed past Sam at the doorway, she whispered: "He's worse!"

She ran to her own small cabin, where she had hidden most of the contents of the medicine chest. While she was there, Mr. Soler came below. When he saw no sign of Peg standing guard, he pushed past Salvation Sam. He gave one keen glance at Muras lying there, looked closer, and put a hand on the bandaged breast. Then he straightened up with a muttered oath, and shoved Sam from the cabin.

"Your job's done, parson, until you read service over him," he said. And to Pineo, suddenly appearing: "Put some clean clothes on him, stooard. He's croaked!"

Pineo's sharp face brightened amazingly. Peg instantly darted back across the saloon, fiery-eyed.

"What's that?" she cried. "Don't let that snipe inside!"

"You can stay out, my girl," said Mr. Soler. "No place for you. You can't nurse a corpse."

Peggy stared past him through the skipper's doorway. She flashed an uncertain glance up at Soler.

"You sure?" she snapped.

"Cold as a fish!" he said.

IX

PEG appeared on deck, looked around for Toivo, and ran down to him where he stood watching the men hanging up the coils of gear. With the mysterious subtlety of bad news, the sailors were apprised of the skipper's death before she had fairly conveyed it to the Finn.

Ropes were dropped. Men forgathered in little groups. The watch below came from the forecabin one by one, and the decks were filled with mutterings. Salvation Sam stood again at the poop rail on one side, the second mate at the other.

Mr. Soler came up, beckoned to Chips, and announced so that all might hear:

"Cap'n Muras is dead. Go down and bundle him up, Chips. You men, carry on with your work. No need for you to think it's a holiday. You, Tyke, lend Chips a hand."

"I'm sick!" Tyke Colomb shouted hoarsely. "Let somebody else go!"

"I'll see if you're sick or not!" growled the mate, and started down the ladder.

The muttering grew. The bark hummed with it. Men grouped together and scowled at Mr. Soler threateningly. Salvation Sam spoke to the mate, and he did not descend, but stood there undecided, while fat Mr. Coles puffed and wheezed behind him, frightened by the aspect of the crew. Salvation Sam turned and went below again.

"Toivo, didn't you hear? Muras shuffled off!" whispered Peggy, pinching the Finn's arm.

He stood gazing far out over the ice, revealing not the least interest in the developments of the past few minutes. His fingers played with the handle of his knife, and with his thumb nail he counted the notches, up and down, up and down. His blue eyes glittered coldly; yet there was a speck of red deep within them, weird as smoldering fires seen behind water cascading over glass.

"Listen, you big lump!" she insisted. "Muras is mutton! He pegged out too quick, didn't he? What 'll you do now if Soler turns back, hey?"

A bright greenish light hung over the ice to the northward under the woolly clouds. The afternoon sun was low. It gleamed across the glassy expanse that imprisoned the bark, casting her shadow unwaveringly toward the eastward until her trucks reached out to the horizon.

Toivo gave no heed to the girl. He seemed unaware of her presence. Young Lute Slade came near, his clear, youthful eyes troubled at what seemed to be her distress; for her small face was upturned to the tall Finn, her eyes blazed darkly, her red lips were parted, and her breath whitened against the frosty air.

"D'you want something, Miss Peggy? Can I do anything to help you?" said Lute, deeply respectful.

The girl swung around, a hot retort on her tongue—only to release her pent-up feelings in a fierce sigh and to smile at him quizzically.

"You're a decent kid, you are, Lute. You don't belong here at all. I wish you could do something for me; but d'you think you can stir life into this big stiff? That's what I want right now. Run along, big boy. He might feel like cutting another notch on your account."

"I'll take the chance, Miss Peggy, if it 'll help you," said Lute quietly.

The girl's eyes darkened, and the color deepened in her face; but she laughed at the young man's earnestness. Taking his arm, she led him over to the main hatch.

"Sit down awhile," she said.

He obeyed her, his face alight, as it had been when he first told her that he was making a ship model for her. Like a bird, she darted her head toward him and kissed him on the cheek, bringing the hot blood to his face in a flood.

"Don't you bother about me," she laughed lightly. "When there's anything you can do for me, I'll call on you, honest. Just now I want you to keep from getting hurt. Be a good boy, now!"

She left him, and returned to Toivo. Lute gazed after her, frowning, troubled, yet obeying her.

Toivo was still gazing out over the ice. His brows were drawn down, and there was a new line at each corner of his mouth—a hard, repellent line. He had taken out his knife, and again his thumb nail ran along the notches. The new notch—the seventh—was slight, far less deep than the rest. The last fresh stain had darkened already.

The girl's fingers stole over his, and her touch caused him to start.

"Toivo," she whispered, at his movement, "I know you didn't knife Muras. His own eyes said so; but how come it was done with your knife? Who cut that notch in it, Toivo?"

"Ay did not cut it, and it was not my knife killed Muras," the Finn replied dreamily.

Salvation Sam paced the short poop, his lips moving soundlessly as he pored over his pocket Bible. His shoulders were bowed and his brows drawn down, while his knees bent over as if he bore a sore burden. The mates stood together by the companionway, silent and uneasy. The darkness gathered early, and the men remained grouped in low-muttering gangs, the sparks of their pipes flying red and sharp, without a word of reprimand from the poop. Mr. Coles waited for Mr. Soler's lead, and Mr. Soler knew not where to lead.

Peggy had gone to her cabin. The boat-swain stood where she had left him, his light blue eyes glittering fixedly toward the northwest.

Presently a sailor who had been helping Chips to prepare Muras for burial came on deck. He spoke to the mate, who grunted a reply and went below. Just as darkness fell, Muras was carried up and laid on the skylight. He was rolled and sewn in canvas, like a bale of rugs, and the shapeless bulge at the feet, where the ballast which was to send him home lay, gave a grotesque impression of a loose head which had slipped to the wrong end.

Salvation Sam stepped over at once, and, with raised hand and upturned face, uttered a short prayer. Meanwhile Chips had spat profusely over the side, and was speaking to the mates in a casual sort of fashion, while Pineo lurked near by, grinning like a hurt cat.

"Watch 'im, I says—watch 'im," said Chips, with a sidewise nod at the steward. "He's gone crazy, Pineo has—out of affection for the cap'n, I s'pose. The little chap wanted to stick another knife into the old man to make sure he was good and dead, he did!"

"Lots o' men have been buried alive!" squealed Pineo excitedly. "How do you know he's dead? You ain't no doctors, none o' you."

"I say he's dead, and dead he is, according to the log," said Mr. Soler.

The second mate was perspiring, for all the frost. Of them all, only old Chips appeared to remain normal.

Peg came up. Without a glance at the body she turned to seek Toivo, but she could not see him for the darkness. The muttering men came nearer the ladder, and a noisier voice than the rest seemed to be putting some question of action. The mate heard that, and got in his say first.

"Boson!" he shouted. Not waiting for a reply, he turned to Chips. "When boson comes aft, Chips, get the men together and rig a grating in the gangway. Then break out mauls, pinch bars, lanterns, and plank. Break a hole in the ice big enough to launch the body through, and the parson shall give him a shove before all hands go batty with fright."

Toivo appeared, tall, placid, cold. As if he were measuring a hatch for a tarpaulin, he estimated the length of the silent canvas parcel. Then he turned to the men.

"Take one hatch cover from ta main hatch, and ta carpenter's big sawhorse. That will be enough," he said.

As indifferently as he might have handled a bolt of canvas, and as easily, he picked up the wrapped body, stood it on the ballasted end, and walked it over to the gangway.

"Crazy as a bedbug!" wheezed Mr. Coles, shivering though he sweated. "Wonder if he knows that's Cap'n Muras he's bundlin' over there like a bunch o' freight!"

Salvation Sam looked on with troubled eyes.

"Is it decent to dispose of the captain so summarily, Mr. Soler?" he asked the mate gently.

The mate laughed harshly, avoiding the parson's gleaming gaze.

"Decent ain't all of it," he said. "Tomorrow the ice may be too thick to break; and the crew, maybe you haven't noticed, is about as contented as a lost rat at a dog show." With a short, hard chuckle that had no mirth in it, Soler went on: "S'pose you heard what Chips said about the stoward? The little body snatcher wanted to dig into the old man's tripes with a table knife, just to make certain he was good and dead. That's another reason why I'm goin' to give him a launch the minute all's ready. You better read up your sermon,

if so be you want to help him along with a breeze o' holy wind."

"My friend, you and all hands aboard this bark would be the better for a tempest of holy wrath to clean out the demons of evil that shipped with us on this voyage!" Salvation Sam returned warmly.

Soler grunted, turning away.

"Holy wrath? Try it! Believe me, this bark needs cleaning out with good old-fashioned manhandling methods. Try your holy wrath palaver, old hymn slinger; then stand by and watch me after you give it up."

"Human anger is futile, my friend," said Sam. "What has it brought so far?"

"My kind hasn't been tried yet," retorted the mate, and picked up a lantern, to inspect the progress of the preparations.

With the going of the swift twilight the last zephyr of air had died, and a handful of big snowflakes fell from time to time. There was a creaking, chafing sound around the bark, and out across the ice could be heard, at times, the metallic, crackling, reverberating "ping" of ice under pressure.

Far away to the southward, where lay the open sea, the ice undulated, and the movement crept toward the Aurora, but diminishingly as it neared her. Once the ice had risen about her stern, reached up, broken, and fallen back in a score of wide cakes, which were already frozen fast to the floe that lay beneath.

Lanterns hung about the decks shed a pale yellow light upon silent, sullen men about the galley, where the doctor ladled out hot tea and dry hash to the idlers of the moment. Other lanterns shone on other men, suspended over the starboard side beside the gangway, plying crowbars, top mauls, and buckets of boiling sea water, as they broke a hole in the ice to the size of an outline calmly pegged out by Toivo.

The ice reformed in a thin crust between the broken cakes, and the men murmured at their task.

"Old man's gorn," muttered one. "Why should we work our guts out this way?"

He jabbed savagely with his bar, which slipped through his numbed grasp and disappeared like an eel in mud.

"Ought to serve a tot o' rum," growled another, staring down at the black hole in the white ice where the bar had gone so slickly.

"Get a move on there!" snapped the

second mate, blowing on his fat fingers.

"I see that pinch bar go, my son. That comes out o' your wages!"

"Go take a jump at yerself!" growled the culprit.

He climbed on board, swearing vividly, and joined the gang at the galley, defiant of second mates, careless of lost crowbars.

Snow began to fall thickly. In ten minutes more, when the hole was finished, the decks were carpeted with soft white, and the heavy flakes clung like feathers to the rigging. The men moved about among the dancing shadows between the lanterns like yellow and black graveyard birds just sprouting sparse white plumage. The still, silent form on the hatch cover at the gangway, uncovered by any flag, slowly assumed the outline of an effigy in white marble.

"Ta hole is reaty," Toivo announced at last.

"Muster aft, all hands!" shouted Mr. Soler, shoving forward Salvation Sam with his book.

The sailors milled restively amidships. The men who had just finished work over the side crowded to the galley for their hot tea; those who had been warmed hated to give way. None wanted to answer that call to bury the dead.

"Shovin' a bloke orf like this in the dark!" muttered Tyke Colomb, furtively stealing another man's pannikin.

Anything to put off going aft!

On the poop the mate peered uneasily at the black shadows where the men hung back. Salvation Sam stood beside the body, his eyes closed, his lips moving softly. Pineo was at the rail, his shifty eye fixed upon the corpse and the cakes of ice soon to cover it.

"Give 'em a nip o' rum all around," wheezed Mr. Coles, who felt that he might be induced to swallow one himself.

The mate nodded.

"Stooard!" Pineo started violently, and his face was white in the lantern light. "Stooard, break out some rum and bring it up. Boson, call all hands aft for grog. Then stand by for burial service."

Still muttering, but licking their chops, the men trooped aft and gathered around the poop ladder to port, avoiding the snow-clad form lying so quietly to starboard. Pineo went and returned in less time than it took the men to assemble, and he dealt out grog with a shaking hand. There was

no water, no limejuice, no sugar to that issue—just strong black rum, slopped out into a tin pannikin by a man who was incapable of measuring to a mark.

"That's the stuff!" gasped a hairy shell-back, grinning foolishly, his eyes streaming. "Now carry on wi' yer funeral!"

The rum worked wonders. Tyke Colomb and Eke Paral fought over the liquor declined by young Lute Slade, and spilled it over the snow. The mates swallowed a stiff ration apiece. Pineo coughed and choked for five full minutes after trying to finish up the jug himself; but the men looked upon the corpse with less scowling faces when they obeyed the order to step across the deck.

"Go on, parson!" said Mr. Soler. "Start in!"

Salvation Sam stepped forward, raised his eyes to the white-flecked skies, and began to sing in a mellow, musical tenor that had just a suspicion of a tremor in it:

"Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead thou me on.
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

Peg Bolter stole close beside Sam, gazing up curiously into his rapt face. As he sang, there was intense silence around, except toward the end of the verse, when young Lute Slade joined in shyly with a broken voice having little melody, but much feeling. Peg stared at him, too, in still deeper curiosity. Then she stared at Toivo Ranta, standing like a tall guardian at the ship's side. The boatswain was gazing far, far away to the north, where a pale glow stole across the heavens, and his eyes were like twin icicles in the lantern light.

The snow fell faster. The ice crackled. The bark moved gently. There was a rumbling crack which ran across the ice from horizon to horizon.

"What's 'e want to 'owl them blessed 'yms for?" whined an old Limehouse dock rat, in whom memory had long since died, and to whom only fear for the future remained. "Don't we know it's dark, and we're a bloomin' long way frum 'ome?"

The bark moved again, rolling with the rhythm of a tolling bell. The men shifted restively. Salvation Sam's mouth was open to start a new verse. His hair was wild, his eyes were alight, his body swayed in a growing frenzy of earnestness.

"Belay singin' and hurry up with your prayers!" Mr. Soler urged impatiently. "Hear me?" he snapped, shaking Sam until the snow flew from the missionary's hair. "The men are gettin' tired o' this hocus-pocus."

Sam shivered. Placing a hand upon Muras's shroud, he raised the closed book aloft and spoke with a rising volume of utterance that grew to a veritable passion:

"Brothers, give heed what I say to you! Here lies the mortal clay of your captain, bound out to meet his Maker. In a few short minutes he will be launched through the hole you have made in the ice. Where to? Into the sea only? You who stand here ready to shove him off"—Tyke Colomb and Pineo were among those who had taken up positions at the head of the hatch, ready to lift and launch, and they grinned at the notice drawn to them—"do you think that's the end of him? He was killed—knifed, as that other poor soul was knifed. Make no mistake, my friends, those two murdered men will meet again in a very few minutes, and they'll have a yarn to spin to the Great Captain that 'll raise the hair of somebody down below here!"

Pineo and Tyke started, glancing at each other furtively. They edged along, nearer the crowd. Sam stayed them with a nervous hand.

"There is a hell of wickedness loose in this ship," Sam went on. "There is a murderer among you. This poor mortal, with all his sins lashed to his back, and no chance to dump them from him, goes to the Father for judgment. He'll know what to say when he gets up there! He knows who opened up his breast and let out his soul! There are hell's torments awaiting the shipmate who stuck the steel in here!"

Sam's hand moved upon the snow-covered canvas shroud. The lanterns shone upon the circle of dark faces. The snow fell in big, dry flakes like pods of cotton. Toivo still gazed across the ice. For him there was neither ship, nor corpse, nor burial. The lantern light lit up eyes sullen or awed, frightened or defiant; and it lit up the brass and silver of the Finn's knife.

"Here, in this poor, sleeping breast—"

Sam stopped suddenly, his eyes wide, his mouth open, his hair wet with the sweat of his fervor. He leaned over the body. Men muttered and moved. The sailors waiting to tilt the bier pushed back against the others.

Fat Mr. Coles wheezed uncomfortably. It was long past his time to go below. Mr. Soler stepped forward to speed up the proceedings. He had all his own plans made, and he intended to put them into effect the moment Muras was decently shoved under the ice. He saw Salvation Sam's right hand dart out and snatch Toivo's knife from the sheath. A swift, desperate slash ripped the canvas, showering the nearest men with snow, and Sam laid his head down upon the exposed breast. In another moment he had ripped the canvas down to the foot, and raised Muras in his arms.

Then Mr. Soler appeared to sense something amiss. He flashed a lantern over Sam's shoulder. Every seaman standing there saw the dead skipper's eyelids flutter apart, and saw the light reflected in the eyes of the supposed corpse!

"He lives!" cried Sam. "He lives!"

The ice gave out a volley of rolling reports like rifle fire. Among the men were curses and grunts of amazement, alarm, and sheer terror. Pineo fell into Colomb's great arms, whimpering. The Limehouse dock rat flung up his hands and howled to the four quarters of heaven:

"A merricle! A bloody merricle! Gawd 'elp us, we're gorn blokes—gorn in our blessed sins!"

X

THE bark lay slightly leaning, fast in the ice, snow-clad and silent. The decks were deserted. A solitary lantern hung in the mizzen rigging, the glass darkened with soot. The ice glittered no more, for the dry snow packed as it fell, and the air was too cold for ice moisture to melt the flakes.

At the gangway the hatch cover still stood, one end resting upon the sawhorse. Through the closed door of the galley a thin thread of light shone, and smoke swirled from the stovepipe. Inside, the doctor and Chips muttered over the creepy thing to which they had been party.

In the forecastle the men huddled around a red-hot boggy, sullen, scared, unwilling to risk sleep. Tyke Colomb sat nearest the stove, smoking furiously, most silent of them all. Lute Slade crouched under the kerosene lamp, poring over a small pocket Bible, his fresh, honest face puckered with the effort to fathom the mystery he had witnessed.

Toivo Ranta stood bolt upright in his tiny cabin, apparently oblivious of the cold,

the snow frozen in his light hair and eyebrows, his oilskin coat unbuttoned, his hands bare. He gazed intently, and with smoldering eyes, at the knife in his hand. His lips were parted, and the glow of his lamp shone upon his strong teeth.

His interest was centered upon the seventh notch. It was not of his cutting, as he had told Peggy; but so intense was his belief in the tremendous things to come to him with the cutting of the ninth notch in that ancient Finnish knife that he had been entirely willing to be deceived about the seventh, which was really only a nick.

The notch seemed to be mysteriously disappearing—that was what held Toivo there in a spell. Handling will darken a fresh scratch, fill it with grime, and in time eradicate it. The boatswain knew that, yet he refused to know it. In his brain was the insistent belief that some power, associated with those powers who would become his servants when the last notch was cut, and who were already favoring him, had caused the merit of the captain's murder to pass to his knife; but now, with Muras alive again, the notch was fading out. It was a demon of suggestion that was setting fire to his unbalanced brain.

Aft, in the saloon, the two mates stood by the fire, holding silent communion. Mr. Coles wheezed uncomfortably, furtively watching the door beyond which Salvation Sam and Peg Bolter were working to hold the faint spark that had so surprisingly remained in the skipper's breast. Mr. Soler wore a scowl, either of suspense or of disappointment. He cursed softly when Sam's voice rose, not in sick room cadences, but in strident prayer.

There was certainly a new note in the missionary's voice. There was frenzy in it—a religious fervor of a kind to ride tempestuously over human reason. Soler's dark face flashed into a fleeting grin at thought of what Muras would have to say if he recovered and found Salvation Sam praying for his soul.

Across the saloon, in the steward's little pantry, Pineo was as quiet as the rest. His door was shut, but he was there, for Peggy had boiled water over the charcoal stove, and had wondered why he had not pestered her as usual. A good many men in the Aurora had tipped her a wink or a grin, and Pineo had been as pushing as anybody, with more opportunity than most; but while she heated the water for Salvation Sam, the

steward had not even looked at her. He seemed to be very busy with a pile of canned stuff, although it was not a very suitable hour for stocking up his shelves.

Then the skipper's door opened, and Peg came out. Salvation Sam was not praying now. He was talking, eagerly, coaxingly, as to a child. Carrying a small saucepan and a heavy wet towel, the girl went over to the pantry, pushing open the closed door, and startling Pineo into dropping a bag of bread.

"You better not be in such a rush, next time you stick a feller," she told him, as she pumped fresh water for her saucepan. "Better do a better job. You ain't half a killer, you ain't!"

Pineo's eyes were bright with sudden terror. Through the open doors another voice interrupted Sam's. It was a weak, quavery voice, but it had carrying power, and it uttered fearsome things. The steward gulped noisily, and Peg shrugged her shoulders at his terrors.

"Will he live?" he muttered. "D'ye think he won't pass out soon's that meddlin' sky pilot leaves him alone?"

"Him pass out?" Peg laughed. "He's tough as hell! Go in and ask him how he feels, when we're through with him. He was asking after you already."

"I didn't stick him! Gawd strike me I didn't! What's he want o' me?"

"You'll see. His eyes looked real sensible when he asked for you. Give me that towel!"

Peg took up her hot water and warm towel.

"Peggy! Peggy! He's fainted again!" cried Salvation Sam. "Hurry!"

Pineo crashed his door shut after the girl. The two mates glanced at each other.

"This is the hell-and-brimstone voyage I ever shipped for," gasped Mr. Coles painfully. "We goin' to keep watch all night?"

"You can, if you like," snapped Mr. Soler. "I'm turnin' in while he makes up his mind whether to live or stay dead. A hell of a note when a man won't stay dead after he's half buried!"

The first mate went on deck, to take a final look around before turning in. The snow was falling less heavily, and a faint breeze drove the smaller flakes slanting across the ice. Immediately above the galley, the warmth of the stove had melted the snow on the mainstay, and the frost had turned it into a long icicle, from the

sharp point of which a drop of water fell with monotonous cadence into the stove-pipe.

The ship was moving. The ice that gripped her undulated and rumbled. Far out in the darkness, beyond the visible white of the snow, something was going on which made Mr. Soler hesitate about retiring. Ice was crashing, and underrunning the broad expanse there was a tremor that was communicated to the bark in a shivery, suggestive fashion. While the mate searched the night for signs of weather change, a black shadow moved stealthily across the main deck between the poop ladders, peering in through the dark saloon ports. The snow crunched under the man's foot, and the mate called out to him to show himself.

"Who's that?"

"Me!" was the answer.

"Step out! Let's see you!"

"Aw, I'm only arter a bit o' cabin leavin's the stooard promised me," grumbled Tyke Colomb, lurching up the ladder and meeting the mate's eye defiantly.

"Bit o' cabin leavings, hey?" echoed Mr. Soler. "Nice time you pick for yaf-fling cabin leavings!"

"What of it? Mustn't a bloke skoff 'is rations because a stiff don't stay dead long enough to get 'im buried?" retorted Tyke impudently.

"You keep watch till eight bells, and skoff yer cabin leavings while you're waiting, my lad," said Mr. Soler. "D'ye hear? Call me if the wind shifts or the ice begins to break around us; and watch yourself. Muras ain't back to life yet—not by a damn sight!"

Tyke waited until the sound of Mr. Soler's steps died away below; then he stole gingerly into the companionway. He listened intently. His excuse about leavings of cabin food was a spurious one. He was anxious for news, but Pineo was failing him. There was no sound of movement in the dim saloon. Only a tiny glimmer of light burned in the swing lamp over the table. The skipper's cabin was dark, as were all the cabins.

Tyke peered into the gloom, and detected a thin light line below the pantry door. He stepped out toward it, but darted back into the stairway as Peg's door was swiftly opened and closed and the girl crept out, muffled in a man's watch coat, which she had borrowed or adopted. She glanced

alertly around her, and then sped on feet as light as a dancer's along the saloon to the companionway.

Tyke reached the deck and ducked out of the way, watching her slip past him like a shadow and run forward along the white main deck. He saw her disappear around the fore hatch, and he knew that she had entered the boatswain's room.

Tyke forgot his own errand. He nodded his uncouth head shrewdly, and started to follow her. Then he came to a different conclusion, and settled himself into a snug corner to wait for her return. He forgot to smoke, so primed was he with the importance of the grip she was giving him to hold over her.

Tyke remembered many a saucy rebuff that he had suffered at the hands of Miss Peggy Bolter. He couldn't understand what she wanted with the Finn at that time of the night; but he wouldn't worry about that. He had seen things, he had!

He knew plenty about that queer Finn. The boatswain wasn't a human being. Not even a pert wench like Peg Bolter could make him human. Tyke was different, now. Tyke was a he-man. He'd tell her something, if she tried to shove him aside when he met her coming aft this time!

The snow seemed to be stopping. The small breeze that had risen grew in strength, and the cold intensified in its path. Tyke shivered in his corner. He stepped outside, walked aft to the clear space abaft the house, and paced rapidly to and fro, swinging his arms vigorously to start the blood leaping.

Soon he glowed, and went back to his corner, taking down the skipper's oilskin coat, which had been hanging inside the deck house companionway to keep out the wind. Once or twice he thought he heard sounds forward—voices—but he could not be sure, for the bark was full of creakings and groanings, and the ice crackled from time to time with a report which filled the skies to the exclusion of all other sound.

He was almost as cold as before, for the wind steadily increased. He was about to go out and stamp and flog for warmth again, when there was an unmistakable sound of voices forward, and Peg came speeding aft like a phantom, darting up the ladder and fair into Tyke's open and eager arms.

"A little snowbird, damned if it ain't!" said Tyke, hugging her to him fiercely.

"Did the boson chuck you out? Never mind, my pigeon, Tyke 'll treat you right! Give us a kiss—hellcat!"

A ragged red scratch leaped out upon Tyke's bristly cheek. Surprise rather than anger was the impulse that caused Peg to deliver it. When Tyke's arms tightened about her, crushing her to him, and his hot eyes glared close to hers, she wriggled in his grasp, not very desperately, and laughed up at him.

"Why didn't you say it was you?" she whispered. "I thought it was Soler."

"Don't like Soler, hey?" chuckled Tyke, tickled pleasantly at the girl's easy surrender.

He planted a slapping kiss upon her warm cheek; and in return received a cracking slap on his own; but Peg laughed softly as she slapped him.

"I'm scared of him," she said. "If Muras passes out, and Soler is skipper, I'm coming forward to live!"

"I'll stick a—" Tyke began valiantly.

She stopped him with a finger at his lips.

"You'll stick nobody. He ain't bothered me yet; but his eyes! I know all about eyes, I do—men's eyes."

"I'll black 'em for him!"

"Maybe, Tyke, later on," Peg murmured. She wriggled in his arms, put her small, eager face up to his, and spoke rapidly. "I been trying to get the big Finn to talk. Say, that feller's a frozen lump o' tripe, if ever there was one! I think he's goin' loony, Tyke. I tried to find out how come his knife to be sticky, and another notch in the handle after Muras was stuck, when we all know he didn't do it."

"You know?" muttered Tyke, impatient at the turn of the chat. He had hoped for a far more interesting subject. "How do you know? What do you know?"

"Muras's eyes said it wasn't Toivo, for one thing. Besides, didn't I see the wound myself? I washed it, didn't I? It was twice as wide as the Finn's knife blade, that cut was!"

The girl snuggled closer, and let her hair tickle Tyke's chin. She felt his hot breath, felt the muscles stiffen in his arms.

"Pineo done it, didn't he, Tyke?" she whispered. "Him and you was very chummy."

"You want to tell Muras?" rasped Tyke harshly, thrusting her from him so that he could peer down into her eyes, which met his boldly.

"Me? Tell him?" she laughed derisively. "Say, what do I care about Muras, after he's sailed the ship to where Toivo takes charge of her? I want to know because I'm scared o' that Finn. He believes that knife o' his wants two more notches, and then he's a better man than Gawd Almighty! Honest to Gawd, Tyke, he believes that! Crazy? Maybe. He believes it, all the same. He don't know or care nothing else. He even believes that the seventh notch is on his knife over Muras's killing, never mind that he never done it, and never mind that his knife never done it. Tyke, I'm afraid! If he gets a little mite more crazy, he's likely to start on a rampage and stick a couple more blokes just to get the other two notches in his knife!"

"Let 'im!" growled Tyke, gathering her close again and grinding his teeth in sudden passion. "What d'you care about the crazy Finn? You care about me a bit more, see!"

"Listen, Tyke—let's go slow a bit. I like you, Gawd knows I do; but we don't want to start nothing, when we're stuck in the ice here. That's why I want to know who knifed Muras. I can tell Toivo that notch don't count, and then he'll quiet down a bit, maybe. We want Muras to take us a bit farther, don't we? You wait till we get our hands on them furs!"

Tyke Colomb laughed unpleasantly. He felt cheated.

"Don't put no stock in the Finn's treasures, then, hey? Well, the stoard believes in the yarn. He stuck his own carvin' knife into the old man, 'cos I couldn't get at the Finn's sticker just then, and the chance come quicker 'n he looked for; but I got at the Finn's belt while he was asleep, and smeared blood on it, and started to cut a notch, so he couldn't get out of it when they charged him. We had it all cooked up to prove he done things while he was only half awake; but he moved, and scared me, and I only half cut the notch. I only scratched it."

"I know!" Peggy broke in. "He's more than half crazy right now, because the notch is fading out. He believes it's because Muras is getting well. Most o' the sailors believe it, too, and they think Salvation Sam pulled a miracle. If we don't stop that line o' hokum, all hands 'll go batty. Say, Tyke," she shot at him ab-

ruptly, swerving from the line they had been following, "who killed poor old Poke Bonnet?"

Again Tyke laughed, less unpleasantly, rather pridefully.

"Why don't you let dead men stay dead? Bonnet pinched the Finn's knife. We was both in it. He held it out on me, an' got stuck in the scramble for it. That blasted Lute Slade scared me so I dropped it and lost it. I'll fix him some time for that! Anyhow, it don't matter. Me an' Pineo figgered to let the Finn make his own kill-in's up to eight, an' then—say, my pigeon, let's you an' me go pardners in this! To hell with Pineo! Let's tell Soler who stuck the old man, an' get Pineo out o' the road!"

"Are you game?" she murmured, shivering with the cold, though Tyke believed it was with fear.

He squeezed her lustily, patting her back.

"You tell Muras," he said. "That's best. Then let 'em ask me. They can't do nothin' to a bloke for smearn' up the Finn's knife. I'll keep lookout for'ard, and you keep on the watch aft. Between us we'll cut in whichever loot is got. Is that a go?"

"You an' me, Tyke!" she said, taking one of his great hands in both of her own. "I'm goin' below now."

"Be good, then!" he returned, with a veiled warning in his tone.

He swept her to him and kissed her savagely. She darted down the stairway, wiping furiously at her bruised lips. When safely out of earshot, she spat noisily.

XI

TOIVO RANTA stood on the forecastle head, gazing northward. He was alone on the bark's deck, though certain sounds told of stirring men about to appear. The dawn was late, for the nights were long, but the skies flamed with magic light. Wavering, riotous, dazzling was the light, and great shafts of it—red, yellow, electric blue, every conceivable color and many inconceivable ones—darted from horizon to zenith. The tall, strange Finn gazed with light blue eyes which held the vision of madness.

Smoke curled from the galley stovepipe in the windless air. The snow had ceased falling. The temperature had dropped. The distant land, with the barricading line of bergs dwindled in the sharpness of the

atmosphere until only a glittering line appeared, clear-cut and remote.

One by one the men passed from fore-castle to galley for the morning coffee. One and all they wore scowling, mutinous faces—all except Lute Slade. He was frankly uneasy, but only that.

Not yet had anybody come up from the cabins. Tyke Colomb, keeping his lonely watch after Peggy left him, was sufficiently thrilled with lustful expectancy to remain on deck until midnight. Then he had turned in, caring nothing about being relieved, since he had received no orders. The bark had lain quiet, and seemingly unwatched, until Toivo aroused from his sleep—which was never more than a succession of light naps—and stepped outside to resume his eternal vigil toward the north. His unwonted muttering and talking to himself awakened Chips, who in turn roused out the doctor. When ready for them, the doctor called the men to come and get their coffee.

"He's goin' daffy!" Chips told his crony, gulping scalding coffee in the galley.

They both glanced out at the Finn, motionless on the fore-castle, his blond head bare to the cold, his blue eyes glittering like ice in rapt ecstasy and awe.

"Hell! He ain't no daffier 'n he allus wuz," grunted the doctor. "He only fol-lers the line his sort allus takes. Them lights sometimes drives a bloke plumb crazy as ain't daffy; but all Finns is daffy."

"They ain't daffy like he is, though," Chips maintained, stealing a half tin of milk which was set out for the doctor's own coffee.

"Livin' with him's made you 'arf batty yerself," said the doctor, taking the milk away with gentle force. "Let him stare at the pretty lights. It's only them roarin' ballyaluses. Sensible blokes don't take no stock in 'em arter seein' 'em once."

"I tell you he's diffrent, since Lime'ouse let out that 'owl about a miracle bein' done over the cap'n. Ain't I been in there all night with him? I tell you, doctor, I'm goin' to arsk the mate to clap him in irons, before he runs amuck, or else I'm goin' to sleep somewheres else. I laid doggo last night for 'arf an hour, with my eyes shut, afraid he was goin' to stick that knife of his into my gizzard. He was squintin' at it, prayin' to it, shockin', and swearin' at somebody to beat hell. His teeth clicked and ground horrible. Something about

Muras comin' to life, and a blessed notch fadin' out of his knife, was what he was yammerin' about. Look at him now! Look at that face! I'm goin' aft right now."

Chips started. At the poop ladder Mr. Coles met him.

"Tell the cook to make coffee for aft. Can't find that damned stooard anywhere," the second mate wheezed sulkily.

A bitter morning and belated coffee never soothed the waking feelings of a second mate; nor did the extra work add any sweetness to the doctor's morning cup.

Pervading the crew, too, there was a rumbling current of uneasiness which had ruffled the cook's composure while serving them coffee. Only Tyke Colomb and Lute Slade seemed to have escaped it. They argued with some mutinous rascals against starting anything like refusal to turn to.

That puzzled the doctor, for of all the crew of the Aurora, Tyke and Lute were the two men least likely to hold similar views; yet both had urged obedience to orders. Any puzzle irritated the doctor. Chips had added to his irritation, and now came the news that Pineo had stowed himself away, putting more work upon the cook's shoulders.

Not until Salvation Sam emerged after a night of anxiety over Muras, bent upon filling his lungs with clean, cool air after the stagnant warmth of the cabin, did anybody show serious solicitude over Pineo's whereabouts. Chips was telling Mr. Soler about Toivo's madness. The doctor had already grumbled to the second mate about the mutterings of the men. Both the cook and Chips had been curtly ordered to pull themselves together and mind their own affairs.

Sam Hewes secured his pannikin of hot coffee, and drank great gulps of it while walking forward to where the Finn still stood. Toivo looked like a frozen corpse—all but his eyes, which were staring keenly at the fading glories of the northern skies.

As the missionary mounted the short iron ladder to the fore-castle head, his gaze followed the boatswain's stare. From the bark's side, as straight as a beam of light, as far as human eye could follow and see, ran the track of a man's booted feet in the frozen snow. Salvation Sam's mouth opened, but he held back the utterance that sprang to his lips. Toivo was gazing out along the line of footprints, but it was

evident to Sam that the Finn's cold, glittering blue eyes did not see them. Yet those footsteps—Pineo's, undoubtedly—stood out in the growing light of dawn too vividly for any normal vision to miss.

"Don't you see, Toivo?" cried Sam, pointing down the tracks to the waning colors in the sky.

"Ay see!" said Toivo, with a fierce thrill in his voice. He stood there like a giant about to assault the gates of heaven, fully confident in his strength. "Ay see ta dancing light! Ta treasure of ta Aare Hauta lies under it, and Ay shall—"

"Yes, yes, Toivo, but the footprints! See, there's that poor misguided steward fleeing from his fears, and running to certain death out there in the bitter ice and snow!"

Toivo was glaring down the tracks with a fleck of foam on his lips. Others, aft, had seen them. Voices rose, and men stared over the rails.

"Send somebody after him?" asked Mr. Coles, as excitedly as his wheezy voice could compass.

Mr. Soler stood undecided. Peg Bolter, pert as a sparrow, was beside him, eying him curiously.

"He knifed the captain, Pineo did," she prompted.

Then she turned and stared forward, at a loud shout from Salvation Sam. He stood with his right arm rigidly outstretched, pointing to the tall figure of the Finn, who was running northward along the fugitive's trail with a long, loping stride that devoured distance.

Sam came running along the deck, breathless.

"I fear for those men!" he cried, much troubled.

Peg smiled up at him quizzically.

"Ain't Toivo gone after Pineo?" she chattered. "He'll bring him back, all right. I know Toivo!"

"But he's gone mad—utterly insane! See, he's got out that terrible knife! He believes Pineo's racing toward those lights, and he'll kill the poor fellow!"

"And a damned good riddance!" snapped Mr. Soler, with a clearer face than he had shown for some time. "If they never come back, I won't miss a meal."

The doctor gathered up the empty coffee mugs, and the mate started to rouse out the men to work. There was little to be done; yet a crew must be kept from the

sin of idleness, for of such sin is trouble bred.

Peg went back to her nursing, her small soul filled with great schemes. The skipper, during the early hours of morning, had recognized her, and his prospect of recovery was clearly impressed on her mind by his behavior. When his eyes first showed complete clarity of the brain behind them, she was rubbing his wrists; and for all his proximity to the eternal gates there was a satisfied smirk about his lips when he weakly gripped her hand and kept it fast in his.

She was not forgetful of her compact with Tyke. Seeing that Muras got well was part of it—doubly so now that the Finn had galloped off across the ice, with a fine chance of never getting back; but, in Peg's plan, compacts were made to be broken when she chose. If Toivo was lost, perhaps Muras would never find his furs, and then the voyage was a downright failure. Still, with Muras alive, there was at least a possibility.

Moreover, the captain was a bulwark between Peg and the lewd regard of Mr. Soler. Soler was sparing of words to her, but few men had said to her half as much as he managed to convey with his eyes.

There was a noisy outburst on deck. She started to look through the porthole that gave upon the main deck, but Muras tightened his grasp, and held her. His eyes were shut, but the same smirk played about his lips. She frowned at him, and tried to pull away her hand; but his grip had the tenacity of death itself, and she remained there, listening.

She heard Mr. Soler shouting angrily. Some of the seamen's voices she recognized, and they were belligerently challenging the mate to turn them to work.

"The bloody ship's cursed!" squealed the Limehouse cockney. "Ain't we seen a merricle? We don't go no farther in the bleedin' 'ooker, do we, mates?"

A chorus of assent drowned any reply the first mate made. The hubbub died away, and presently both mates came below, to talk matters over. Peggy could hear Salvation Sam crying after the men, and she heard the forceful retorts they sent him; but Sam went off with them, as she knew by the diminishing volume of his voice, and soon silence ruled the bark again—outside, at least.

As the day wore on, Muras mended rapidly. Powerful naturally, and of strong

will to live, he refused to remain ill as he had refused to die. Before noon Peggy wished that he had been dropped overboard, for he held on to her with a tenacity which wearied her.

He contrived to let Mr. Soler know that promotion was not yet in sight. The interview was brief, and when the mate went out it was to begin a campaign of conciliation with the men. Chests of warm clothes were broken out, fuel was issued in generous amount for the forecabin, a rum ration was established, and food rations were increased.

"I'm sick, and the ship's fast, and there's no use nursing trouble further, mister," Muras told Mr. Soler. "I'll be well in a couple of days, and I'll attend to any talk of mutiny then."

So Salvation Sam reported, after the noon meal, at which the better rations were served, that the spirit of the crew was very much mellowed. Only the doctor seemed to nurse a grouch.

"He's angry because he has double work already, now Pineo's gone, without cooking extra rations for the crew," Sam suggested. "I'll be glad to lend him a hand, captain, but there is something I can do which would be far more worthy. There are plenty of men who would welcome a chance to work in the galley."

"What's on your mind?" inquired Muras, who thought he had disposed of all the ship's worries for the moment.

"Captain Muras, you have been miraculously brought back from the very portals of eternity!" cried Sam, whose expression had undergone a startling change in an instant. He had been just a man trying to help; now he was an apostle, and a fervor akin to frenzy already lighted his eyes. "Have you thought of giving thanks?"

"Me?" gasped Muras.

He had been daydreaming of the time to come, when he might form his own idea of suitable thanksgiving, aided and abetted by Peg Bolter. Sam had rudely reminded him that if the missionary had not prolonged his burial service far beyond the pleasure of Mr. Soler, he would even now have been an object of curiosity of a host of slimy green eels five hundred fathoms down beneath the bark's keel.

"You, captain! You should thank God," said Sam stridently.

"Go swing the cat!" growled Muras.

"What would I thank God for? If half

your sky pilots say is true, a man must be a damned fool to want to live, when he's got a chance to die and see your pearly gates!"

"Do not blaspheme!" cried Salvation Sam, his eyes blazing. "What reason have you to suppose you were bound that way? I shall pray for your better understanding, brother. Your whole crew would be the better for prayer. They stood out there in the bitter cold and snow, waiting to launch you out into the beyond. They saw your amazing deliverance from death. They are uneasy because of the violence done on board this bark, and they need sustaining grace. Cannot they come aft into the saloon and join with us in thanks for your deliverance?"

Muras had writhed uneasily, but he grinned now, like his old self.

"Where d'ye get that notion?" he said. "That lot o' mutinous swabs give thanks for my deliverance? If you can perform such a miracle as that, you'll have me well again in half an hour! Damned if I wouldn't like to see that, *padre*. Tell Mr. Soler to bring all hands aft for prayers. He'd better promise 'em grog, and tell 'em they can smoke, or he won't get a muster at all."

"They will come, and be glad to come," Sam declared, and hurried out, with his long arms working nervously, as if he were already exhorting the men of the icebound *Aurora* to repentance.

Sam may have mentioned rum and tobacco, or he may not. He may have gathered his congregation by personal magnetism, or it may have been drawn by the sailor's sheer curiosity regarding something new. It may be that the men really needed the support of some power other than their own physical toughness. Whatever the reason, in ten minutes the bark's saloon was packed with sailors, led by young Lute Slade, wearing a hopeful, sincere look, and shepherded by Tyke Colomb, displaying a leer of self-approval for the benefit of Peggy.

Old Chips was there, in a sheepskin "wind breaker" that smelled of long gone sheep. The doctor was there, in dirty dungarees and greasy white cap, wiping his red hands on a pestilential bit of waste which he had just used to swab out the pea soup boiler. There were oilskins, woolly sweaters, rubber boots, and leather boots greased with tallow. There were men who cleaned themselves every day, if only with salt

water, or melted snow. There were those who believed that perfect health at sea is only to be obtained by complete abstinence from ablutions, and who cursed most luridly when washed perforce by a boarding sea or a torrential rain.

Most of the men smoked. There were corn-cob pipes, clay pipes, and wooden pipes, some foul, some clean, and all flavorsome. Some men chewed tobacco, some chewed snuff—strong Copenhagen snuff which had the reek of the pit in it. All added their bit to the tremendous atmosphere of the cabin, which speedily took on the aspect of a barroom when the stove is red-hot. The mates coughed disgustedly. Muras, almost choking, yet chuckled at the setting for his thanksgiving service.

"Where's Peggy?" Muras asked, when the men were all below and the companion-way doors closed. "Tell the girl to help the parson. She can serve the rum, anyhow. Dunno about the prayin'. Mr. Soler, tell her to bring out grog for the good lads who are so glad to see me back from the jaws of death!"

The murmur that answered him only made him chuckle more.

XII

SALVATION SAM opened his pocket hymn book. He swayed under the influence of intense religious zeal, which welled up within him almost to suffocation. In spirit he was back in his Bethel again, and he opened the service as had always been the custom at his mission.

"We'll open with a hymn, lads, and you can all make the chorus a rouser," he said, and immediately opened his wide mouth in song:

"I don't care where they bury me—
Swing those gates ajar!
Whether on the land or in the sea,
Oh, swing those gates ajar!"

Sam did not seem to notice that he sang alone. The sailors grinned foolishly when he swung into the chorus, waving one long arm in time to the tune, his eyes half shut, his head upturned:

"Swing them open, angels!
Swing them wide and far!
The bells do ring, the angels sing—
Oh, swing those gates ajar!"

He roared out the lines to the last, swaying from side to side in ecstasy. Young Lute Slade started to sing when the chorus was reached, but turned red and stopped

short when he found that he was alone. Before his confusion made him uncomfortable, Peg Bolter slipped in and sat beside him, offering him the book she had received from Sam.

"Never mind the singin'," she whispered. "Chuck a bluff, and let him talk. He won't know we're here."

That was literally true. As soon as Sam finished the hymn, he put down the book and commenced to pray. His eyes rolled upward until the whites showed. His gaunt figure shook with fervor. There were fire and brimstone in his prayer.

"Look down upon this frail bark, Heavenly Captain, and chasten these sinful souls!" he boomed.

Sam went right to the point. He related to his Heavenly Captain all the evil that the ship had known. He dug into the private lives of Muras, of the mates, of all hands, clear down to the dirty doctor, pleading for divine power to visit them in their sin and lead them to the light.

"Chasten the heart of Ben Muras, so that he may humbly give praise for his deliverance. Have mercy upon him, Lord, for he is but a child in spirit!"

Sam finished his prayer, drew breath, and prepared to launch out into a sermon. Muras choked with rage in his bed; but before he could put his wrath into speech, Sam had started again:

"Brothers, repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand! Aye, and nearer than ye think! Scoff ye may, but believe ye must, unless hell fire and damnation are to be your portion! There is evil abroad. This ship is full of evil. Your captain but yesterday skimmed back over the line by the breadth of an eyelash. To-day he lies in his bunk yonder, scoffing. Beware, I say—beware! I say to Ben Muras, beware! Here in the ice we lie, helpless unless the Great Pilot helps us. Out yonder in the north, where the bergs blot out the sky, and the frozen fiends of snow and ice hold revel, two mortal souls from this ship face death. Days or weeks may pass before others go; but go ye will, go ye must, mad with the white days and the nights of silence, if ye depend upon human strength alone for your support. Come to the throne of grace, brothers! Learn to pray! Come out and cry for salvation while there's time! Then help me pray for the soul of Ben Muras, lying yonder in his thankless pride!"

"Gawd lummee, Sam, can I git some o'

that salvation?" bawled Limehouse, his red-rimmed eyes winking and full of tears.

"Come on out, brother, and I will struggle with the Father for mercy," boomed Sam.

Limehouse tottered forward, heedless of the grins of his mates. Those grins became a bit sheepish as he reached Sam and knelt on the floor.

Peggy darted into the pantry, seized a jug that she had ready, and began to pass rum around, for the men muttered darkly.

"Soler! Soler! Where in hell are you?" came the weak voice of Muras, quivering with fury. "Soler!"

The mate hurried in.

"Soler, chase out that howling fanatic, and send the men for'ard! Tell the sky pilot to do his preachin' in the forecandle after this, and to leave me out of his prayers, unless he wants to smell some o' that hell he yawps about! Such a dumblasted uproar! Send the wench in to me with some hot rum!"

While Peggy served hot rum to the skipper, Salvation followed his new convert to the forecandle, and started the service over again, in spite of all protests. Tyke Colomb could be heard, even through distance and closed doors, loudly threatening Sam with dire penalties if he carried on with his preaching; but Tyke lost out, for Peg and Muras heard the parson begin to spout once more.

"Damned if the parson hasn't got 'em started!" chuckled Muras, pinching Peg's cheek. "He'll have 'em tamed yet. I thought he was a nuisance, Peggy, but he's all right. I think I can sleep a spell. Call me in two hours, and don't you leave me, d'ye hear?"

Peggy sat there, her hand fast gripped in the skipper's. There was an uneasy feeling about the bark, as if she were about to move forward; yet the ice was unbroken about her. The girl could see it through the portholes. She wanted to get out into the fresh, bracing air and shake off the feeling of imprisonment that was fast taking hold of her.

Muras breathed stertorously, his breath catching every little while, and his teeth showing in a grin of pain in the spasms which gripped him yet; but on the whole he rested easily. Peg drew away her hand, and he moved fitfully; but she touched his face with her fingers, and he smiled in his sleep. She went out while the smile lasted.

Mr. Soler was in the saloon, sitting at the table and writing in the ship's log. He caught at her arm as she passed, dragged her to him, and slipped an arm about her waist. Mr. Soler was a man of few words, but of vast assurance. He crushed her against the arm of the chair, and tried to kiss her. Afraid of waking Muras, Peg resisted him silently, laughing in his face, and revealing a strength which he had not expected to encounter in that small and slender person.

"Don't waste yer time on that half dead 'un!" said the mate, nodding toward the skipper's cabin.

Peg tried to free herself. Of all things, she wished to avoid making a noise; but the mate had the strength of lust in his arms, and his hot breath scorched her through her dress.

"All right!" she whispered. "Don't break me in two, big boy! Wait till I get some hot water from the galley. We'll have a hot toddy, and you can tell me what's bitin' you. Let me go!"

"You're goin' to tell Muras!" he gritted.

"Me?" Peg laughed softly. "Don't be afraid. I got no love for that cripple. I won't be long."

He let her go, and she ran up the companionway like a flash, spitting like a cat when she was safe on deck.

Staring around in the first moment of vague vision after coming from the interior gloom into the outer glare of snow and ice, she found the decks bare of life, except for two men smoking under the skids. There was a deep, resonant hum in the forecandle, with a frequent uprising note of hysteria. It was Salvation Sam at his work of revival. Judging from the sounds that Peg heard, he had succeeded in placing his congregation under the spell of his fervor.

"Pull for the shore, sailor—pull for the shore! Heed not the rolling waves, but bend to the oar. Safe in the lifeboat, sailor, cling to self no more; Leave the poor old stranded wreck and pull for the shore!"

The sturdy old stave was bellowed out by both watches as if they really wanted to sing. Sam had a happy knack of picking songs to suit sailors. Every sailorman who ever drifted into a mission, seeking free coffee or shelter from an unwelcome rain-storm, knew that hymn. The words had a tang, and the tune swung along like a ship swinging down the Trades. There were

wind, and storm, and promise of snug harbor in the song.

Peg had heard it a score of times in Sam's Bethel, and she could have sung it, had she wished to; but she was not feeling angelic just then. She felt more like slanging some man who could and would slang her back. She could not see who were the truants smoking under the boat skids. One looked as if he might be Lute Slade; but she distinctly heard Lute's young voice roaring out the chorus of Sam's song.

While she peered, her eyes becoming accustomed to the glare, the masts suddenly shivered until the taut braces twanged. The ice that gripped the bark gave forth a volley of crackling reports, like a park of guns, and undulated from horizon to horizon. A strong breeze blew out of the south, and from far away in that direction the ocean swell crept under the frozen sheath and broke it in a hundred places.

Peggy clutched the ladder, frightened, and the two men under the skids came out, to glance warily aloft at the quivering spars; but the revival went right on.

Tyke Colomb was one of the two. As soon as he saw Peg, he came up to her.

"Scared, little pigeon?" Tyke guffawed. "I won't let nothin' happen you."

"Who's scared?" she retorted.

"You! You're as white as that snow, kid. What's up? 'Tain't only cracked ice, I bet."

The singing had ceased. Men began to emerge from the forecastle, as louder reports came from the breaking ice. Mr. Soler appeared in the companionway door, and before he gave the ship's situation a glance his glaring eye rested upon the girl and the sailor. Peggy saw that, and in an instant seized upon an evil inspiration.

"Soler's been bothering me, Tyke!" she whispered, and ran down the ladder toward the grouping men.

Young Slade stepped to meet her, for she glanced backward, as if frightened.

Tyke Colomb met the mate's glowering glance boldly. Salvation Sam, pale of face, but glittering of eye, moved among the men, admonishing them to be strong in the Lord, and to try to learn to sing before the next meeting.

"What's the matter, Miss Peggy?" Lute asked, as she ran to his side. "Anybody been sayin' things to hurt you? Who was it?"

"No, no!" she whispered. "Look!"

Her voice quivered, and she made a great pretense of terror; but there was a devil lurking in her eyes as she saw the mate make a threatening gesture at Tyke. Tyke replied with more than a gesture. He struck hard with his fist, and Mr. Soler staggered back, spitting blood. When another blow was struck, however, it was by the mate, with brass knuckles, and Tyke fell backward down the ladder, his scowling face dripping crimson.

The men started aft, with the gaunt figure of Salvation Sam leading them. Then Peggy laughed shakily, clutching Lute by the jacket.

"Wait, Miss Peggy!" cried Lute, gently prying her hands loose. "You stop here. I'll go and get Tyke Colomb away. That's mutiny!"

Tyke and Mr. Soler were fighting like a pair of dogs, tangled together on the deck, while the men stared, in uncertainty whether to cheer or to remember that they were just fresh from a mission meeting.

"Don't you meddle!" Peg cried sharply. "Stay out! You don't belong in that mess, Lute!"

The youngster looked at her wonderingly, for there was a quality in her tone which suggested concern for his safety. That, in turn, suggested many pleasant things which he had devoutly wished might come to pass. The rich color flooded his honest face, and he made bold to press her arm, very gently; but he had notions of duty. Aft was an officer, attacked by a seaman.

"Mr. Soler is being attacked," he said. "He is alone. It is my duty to go to his assistance, Miss Peggy!"

Peg was keenly watching the progress of the fight. She saw some of the sailors edge closer and deal surreptitious kicks—at whom, she could not see, but she was at no loss to guess. Salvation Sam's voice roared for peace, while his long arms pried and hauled at the combatants.

"You don't want to lose any sympathy over Soler," Peg whispered to Lute, managing to convey an idea of sweet confusion. "Soler has been pestering me—that's what it's all about."

"Did you tell Tyke, then?" Slade blurted out, in swift chagrin.

"He was the first I saw, Lute. I was looking for you. Don't quit me now, please!"

Right there, in the midst of the uproar, a blast of chill wind swept a cloud of snow

from the ice and hurled it across the bark. The flocs around her rose up, broke, and piled in vast cakes against her side, while she rolled down steeply and remained heeled, the ice packed under her bends.

Muras appeared, like a ghost, wrapped in his bedclothes, and looked ghastly with his sunken eyes and his deathly pallor. The bark's leaning rolled the men down to leeward, and separated the fighters. There was no time for a renewal of the conflict, for behind that initial blast there was a gale that threatened to bring the bark to grief among the broken flocs.

"Look out there!" yelled a keen-eyed sailor, pointing northward.

All hands responded. The cry took attention away from Tyke and the mate. Muras tottered and clung to the poop rail, staring at the moving ice.

Out across the breaking ice field a small black figure moved rapidly toward the Aurora. It was so distant as to be indistinguishable; but, man or beast, it leaped fissures in the ice, striding from cake to cake with a surety of footing nothing short of miraculous. It came on at speed; and Mr. Coles, wheezing from the exertion of tumbling from his warm bed and running on deck when the bark began to lean over, announced, while Muras's trembling hands muddled with his binoculars:

"It's the Finn—alone, too!"

Toivo covered the last cable length of ice by a succession of tremendous leaps. His hair and beard were frozen stiff. His legs, from toe to knee, were huge with accumulated ice and snow. Patches of purple on his cheek bones might be frostbite; but fire glowed in his light blue eyes, and there was grim triumph in his expression.

Mr. Soler, leaving Tyke Colomb for another day, scowled blackly as the Finn climbed on board and turned forward without offering a word of explanation for his expedition. Muras tried to shout, but his voice failed him. He was on the verge of collapse from his hasty emergence.

"Here, you, boson!" yelled Mr. Soler. "Cap'n wants you. Where in hell you been? Where's the stooard?"

Toivo turned slowly, and his precious knife was in his hand. Halted on his way to his cabin, he seemed startled to find that he had an audience. Peg and Lute Slade still stood beside the mainmast, and by them Toivo halted. He caught sight of Lute's knife, and snatched it from the lad's

belt. Then he marched aft, and men made way for him fearfully, for as he went he plied Lute's knife with intense application, cutting a new notch in his own knife haft in place of the almost eradicated scratch—cutting it so deep that it could never fade out.

"Ay caught ta stooard, and he wouldn't come back," he said clearly, calmly, still cutting away at his notch. "Ay say ta captain want him, and he say ta captain go to hell. I carry him, and he knife me wit' a carving knife—see!" Toivo opened his shirt at the neck and showed a red and angry cut. "Ay knife him, and he is deat. Ay come aboard."

As coolly as he had come, the boatswain turned, gave back Lute's knife, and walked forward.

"Won't you put him in irons, sir?" stammered Mr. Soler.

"What for?" gasped Muras, grinning for all his weakness.

"Ain't he a bloody murderer? Is the ship to be run by murderers, and nothing done to 'em?"

"Toivo's no murderer," Muras retorted. "Executioner, he is. I need him yet. Break out pikes and poles to fend off the ice if we begin to—move—and—"

Muras collapsed, and was borne below. Peg saw him totter, and started aft.

"This ship is cursed!" muttered young Lute, holding her back. "I wish you could be out of it, Miss Peggy! I wish I was out of it! The men are scared. Look at 'em! Salvation Sam won't be able to do anything with 'em, if anything else happens like this. They're afraid of Toivo. They're afraid of themselves. Gee, I wish we was all out of it and safe back home!"

Peg laughed bitterly.

"You don't wish it any more than me," she said, pulling away from him. "Fat chance we got, though! Take a look around you, Lute. Be good, and take care o' yourself. I got to hold hands with that Muras devil, and kid myself I'm doing it out o' womanly kindness."

She ran aft, laughing still; but nothing in her words or her laugh suggested womanliness. Only her eyes, softened toward him as they had not softened to many, told Lute that she had to play a part.

"Poor kiddie!" he muttered, as he went about his work. "I'll have her out o' this some day and take her home!"

Later in the evening, as he prodded at

the floating ice with a pole, working along-side of Tyke Colomb, Lute was puzzled at his companion's apparent cheerfulness, for Tyke's homely face had been cruelly battered by Soler's brass knuckles.

"I'm solid with the little witch, anyhow!" was the burden of Tyke's unspoken thoughts.

XIII

AN hour before the ice broke up, the gale screamed across the desolate waste and worried the bark as a pack of wolves might worry a trapped deer. Windy blasts tore at her spars, ripping great masses of frozen snow from her furled sails, and making her stiffened rigging crackle as if all was coming down about the men's ears. A tumultuous sea from far beyond the ice edges rolled beneath the frozen field and set the floes to clashing and grinding. The bark labored in the swell until her planking was scarred and splintered and her copper stripped to glittering rags.

Before another day dawned, the ice was shattered into cakes small enough to be thrust aside by a moving ship. The wind was a fierce but steady gale off the land.

"Get sail on her and run her out of it!" Muras peevishly bade the mate. "I can hear the water flowing in the hold! Can't you take care of the ship? Must I come up, half dead, and take charge, or drown in my bunk?"

"He'd get well quicker if that hellcat of a wench wasn't nigh him!" Mr. Soler grumbled to Mr. Coles, as they roused out the men to make sail.

Topsails and a fore-topmast staysail were put on the bark. Then the spanker was hauled out. The job was begun in surly silence, the men dragging listlessly on the ropes, and getting in one another's way.

Salvation Sam's enthusiasm had cooled, for most enthusiasms will cool in the bitter drab dawn of an arctic gale; but he made a gallant effort.

"Come, lads, sing one of your rousing chanteys!" he shouted, his hair flying, his long arms reaching for a rope.

Limehouse, the first convert, the most easily frightened, the simplest soul, responded with the alacrity of a true sycophant. He shuffled to the head of the line of men at the fore-topsail halyards, and raised his voice:

"Oh, they call me 'angin' Johnny!"

There was a weak and unwilling response to the refrain:

"Hooray! Hooray!"

Limehouse shut his eyes, pointed his head aloft like a baying hound, and bayed;

"Because I 'ang for money!"

Mr. Coles hustled among the men, and tried to lead in a more hearty response:

"So, hang, boys, hang!"

Limehouse started the second stanza of his cheerful ditty:

"Oh, fust I 'ung me mother!
And then I 'ung me brother!"

"That's a hell of a ditty to 'owl!" grumbled Al Raupo.

Other men muttered, too, and shivered. Salvation Sam pulled Limehouse down from the head of the hauling party, and bellowed with fine fervor:

"Let's not hang any more, lads! Follow me!"

With his long arms and gaunt shoulders swaying and swinging to the lilt of it, he fitted one of his spirited mission hymns to the needs of the moment:

"I don't care where they bury me—
Swing those gates ajar!
On the land or in the sea—
Oh, swing those gates ajar!"

"That's the bully lad!" wheezed Mr. Coles, gladly slipping back out of the fore-front, for all hands joined in and made Sam's improvised chantey a rouser.

Down in the cabin Muras heard it, and closed his eyes in peace, to wait for Peggy and his early morning cocoa.

The frozen canvas aloft crackled and flogged in the gale, pelting the men on deck with icicles and lumps of frozen snow, to the peril of their lives; but Salvation Sam, bareheaded to the storm, his face alight with fervor, and all his body at work, led the song as unconcernedly as he would have sung it at his mission:

"If you get there before I do—
Swing those gates ajar!
Just ask the Lord to let me through—
Oh, swing those gates ajar!"

When the halyards were belayed, the men trooped after Sam to the next job, howling out the chorus to his song—which

they had been prevented from singing while hauling, because the rhythm would not fit the pull of the halyards:

"Oh, swing them open, angels! Swing them wide and far!
The bells do ring and the angels sing—
Swing those gates ajar!
Swing them open, angels! Oh, swing them wide and far!
The bells do ring and the angels sing—
Oh, swing those gates ajar!"

Thanks to Salvation Sam, the men completed their work of getting the bark under control without having time to think of their doubts and fears.

There were two very distinct parties in the Aurora's fore-castle, or perhaps three. The third was a very small party, however.

There were the men who, like Limehouse, were finely responsive to emotional frenzy. They had swallowed Salvation Sam's revival—physic, cork, and bottle. Limehouse was scared out of his skin that evil was hanging over the bark, and could be kept away from his precious head by the fear of God and loud singing. The rest of his kind followed his example, rather than take a chance on their own.

There were the sailors who had imbibed to the throat the fear of the uncanny and the unknown. These men shivered in the fear that Toivo Ranta might, after all, be in touch with tremendous powers far beyond their ken. They, too, would follow Sam, for lack of leadership from the Finn.

The third party, if it really had a separate existence, consisted of Lute Slade, whose early training had implanted in him a clean and wholesome belief in a Supreme Power—a belief not dependent on emotional frenzy or fear; and of Tyke Colomb, who didn't believe in anything unless it promised to be to his advantage.

Around seven bells, when the bark had been shaken to the keel a dozen*times by crashing masses of ice, and a fine, cutting snow, driven on a sixty-mile gale, started men's faces bleeding and stung the eyes to temporary blindness; when the watch below looked longingly at the galley, impatient to be at their breakfast; and out of the shivery unpleasantness of the open deck; when the watch on deck were wondering why the mates did not send the other watch below out of the way—just then Mr. Soler brought a jug of grog from the cabin. With a crooked grin on his face, he shouted for the men to muster aft.

"Lay aft for grog, lads!" he bawled.

They responded readily. They wondered at the grin. The grog they understood.

"Sure we earned it!" growled Tyke Colomb, first at the ladder.

"Watch below, get breakfast! Watch on deck, start the main pumps!" shouted Mr. Soler, taking back the empty glass from the sputtering Tyke. "Soon as you get your breakfast, relieve the watch on deck, and keep the pumps going. Boson!" Toivo raised his light blue eyes from the chaotic ice-strewn sea, to gaze vacantly at the mate. "Boson, Cap'n Muras wants to see you after breakfast. Chips, take charge of the pumping. Keep the wells sounded. Cap'n Muras says he can hear water under the cabin floor."

When mid forenoon arrived, and the skies and sea were blotted out by a dense snowstorm that came with the slight moderation of the gale, the bark was driving through the battering ice floes toward the open sea, with both watches pumping by turns.

Salvation Sam had eaten breakfast with the sailors, and had spiced the food with a red-hot bout of "wrestling with the Lord," as he termed the brand of prayer he used at such times. Now he headed a pumping gang, with the high courage of the genuine men of his kind. He led the grumbling sailors in a pumping song, which soon had them warm and swaying. They began to believe that they were better off at the pumps than the men who hung down about the bark's head rigging staving off tumbling ice with pike poles, and getting frozen into mere shapeless lumps of ice after fifteen minutes of it.

The green sea gushed from the pump spouts, welling midway to their knees, and it gushed with fearful volume; but Sam kept the song going, and the gang gave it tongue:

"A little ship was on the sea—it was a noble sight;
It sailed along so pleasantly, and all was calm and bright.
And all was calm and bright, and all was calm and bright;
It sailed along so pleasantly, and all was calm and bright."

The other men pumped to a different tune, for Tyke Colomb headed that gang, and he believed in the old chanteys. There was stingo to them—none of your wish-

wash sentiment, but stuff for the interest of men. Tyke howled, and his gang, as sailors do, followed the leader like sheep:

"Oh, Sally Brown's a bright mulatto—
Way, hay, roll and go!
Oh, she drinks rum and chews tobacker—
Spend all my money on Sally Brown!"

By evening Sam was hoarse, and his gang were not so musical. Tyke and his gang had long since stopped singing. The decks of the *Aurora* were bleak and dismal, for the snow drove pitilessly, and the ice battered at her hull. Water still poured from the pumps. The boatswain had been with Muras for hours. The two mates relieved each other at two-hour intervals, while the pumps were going, and exchanged curt and biting remarks about a skipper who held long conferences with a boatswain while two capable mates were excluded; but there was nothing to be done about it.

Chips reported the water considerably lower. The wind moderated still more, and the cakes of ice thundered at the bows with less ferocity.

Just when even Salvation Sam despaired of keeping the men at work, Peg Bolter appeared, wearing a cheery smile on her rosy face, and carrying the heavy grog pitcher. This was an extra. The mates stared at her, but she only wrinkled her small snub nose at them. She had spent a whole afternoon in peace, without any man pestering her with attentions, and she felt so much happier that she simply had to share her feelings. The sharing took the form of issuing a grog ration entirely on her own responsibility.

If she had been trying to see how best she could further the ship's business and the peace of the crew, she could not have chosen a better method.

"Step up, boys! This is on me!" she cried.

The *Aurora* again sailed through light floating ice before a fair breeze. Chips had not found it hard to locate the leak; for if ice had caused it, it must be near the water line, since the bark had not been so badly nipped as to rise very much from the water. There was no more pumping than sufficed to keep the men warm in their watches.

Muras was well enough now to remain on deck, well wrapped up, and seated in a chair, for several hours daily; and Toivo Ranta was never allowed to go far away

from the poop. The two mates had ceased speaking to either the captain or the boatswain except on matters of ship's business, and then not to Muras unless he first spoke.

Truth was, there was too much splitting of authority. No steward had been appointed since Toivo so coolly reported the death of Pineo; but Peg Bolter seemed to have taken on at least the steward's privileges. She did not assume the duties, except such light ones as pleased her. She was very free with the rum ration; but when Mr. Soler cautioned her about that, she flamed at him, and ran to Muras about it. Thereafter Mr. Soler interfered no more; but his eyes followed her everywhere, and there was a red devil lurking behind them.

Twice daily Salvation Sam conducted a rousing revival service in the forecabin, and the men liked it. Some of them imbibed the frenzy of hysterical belief, thrilled and urged by the fervor of the singing. Some simply joined in because it was something new; and some—the loudest singers, too—shut their eyes tight, wagged their heads, and bawled "Amen" to the prayers, because while they did that the mates could not find jobs for them.

Sam was very earnest. He had got permission from Muras to conduct his revival, and neither Mr. Coles nor Mr. Soler dared say him nay.

Old Chips and the doctor drew closer than ever in their queer friendship. Nearly always Chips could be found in the galley. Truly, there was not much work for him to do about the ship. His daily round of the pump wells, and his examination of the ice-clad bows, hatches, and mast partners, could easily be completed in half of the daylight hours.

The doctor was not boisterously pleased at first.

"You wouldn't be so fond o' this yer galley if that blessed wench wuzn't in an' out all the time!" he grumbled.

At which Chips grinned.

"If the wench wuzn't in an' out so much, you wouldn't want me out o' yer way," he retorted.

"You be damned!" the doctor snapped; but he brightened up when Chips took himself off forward just about the time when Peggy was due to fetch the special soup for Muras.

"Ready?" chirped Peg briskly, appearing in the doorway with her covered pitcher.

The doctor hurriedly wiped his hands on his apron and laid aside his pipe.

"Here, let me do that! You'll upset it. Gee, you're all trembly, doctor!" cried the girl, staring at him curiously.

"I'll empty it. It's hot, miss. Wouldn't like fer you to burn yer pretty self, miss," mumbled the doctor, leering at her with a goatlike eye.

Peg put down her pitcher, placed her hands on her trim hips, and regarded him with her pert head on one side. For a moment her red lips were pressed in a thin, hard line. Then her eyes twinkled, her lips parted, and she laughed.

"Life's full of surprises, ain't it?" she giggled. "Hurry up with that soup, deary! Who'd 'a' thought, when I had my fortune told, it 'd come true like this?"

"What wuz it, Peggy?" the doctor wanted to know, bold in the certainty that he had made a swift conquest.

"Peggy!" she echoed. "You're a fast worker, ain't you? I'll tell you what the fortune teller said. Come on with that soup! Muras is yelling for it. The fortune teller told me I'd go a long journey over the water, and I'd meet a handsome, middle-aged man who'd fall madly in love with me; but to beware of him, for he was a heartbreaker. Give us that soup, old dear!"

The doctor chuckled as he handed her the jug.

"Don't be uneasy, Peggy! I ain't breakin' no hearts no more," he said. "I got a heavy case on you, sweetie. How about a little party all snug an' warm in here arter supper?"

"I'll have to ask the cap'n," she laughed, as she left.

The early darkness clothed the bark, and the wind had fallen to a light air, when Peggy ran from the poop and groped her way forward. The northern skies were beginning to glow with many-hued rays, dim but wonderful.

She felt her way along the rail, and at the fore rigging she bumped into Toivo. The Finn stood beside the rail, with one hand on a backstay, and his gaze was fixed upon those dim rays.

"Hello, Toivo!" Peg whispered, subdued by his very fixity. "What d'ye see, hey? There ain't anything out there, Toivo. Here, I got to get this key fixed. It don't lock my door any more. Somebody's been

funny with it, I'll bet! Who'll do it, Toivo?"

Toivo made her no reply, and she stamped her foot furiously. He gazed away into the north as if he possessed second sight and the riddle of the universe lay open to him there.

The bark was moving easily, as if she were alive and relished the caress of the ice at her sides. The snow had ceased falling. The wind was fainter. Out of the southeast rose a round, golden moon, which for the moment routed the fainter glories still wavering in the north.

"Toivo! You dumb? Can you fix my key?"

"Ay have ta key," he droned, never moving his head. "Ay have ta key to ta treasure of ta Aare Hauta, and Ay will buy you—"

"Oh, go shoot fish!" she cried. "I'm goin' to tell Muras you've gone maggoty, you big tripe! I'll ask Chips to help me."

The boatswain made no sign. She left him standing there like a gaunt statue, stumbled across the deck in the black shadows cast by the sails, and knocked on the carpenter's door.

"Can't you open the door?" growled Chips.

"Maybe you ain't fit for a lady to see," she laughed.

There followed a thud inside, a shuffling, and hard breathing. Then Chips flung open his door and grinned welcome.

"If it ain't our little snowbird!" he exclaimed. "Step in, Miss Peg. You kind o' take the wind out o' my sails. Come right in! Have a little snifter o' good rum? Not bad, eh, Peg? Does you good, don't it? Makes you feel warm an' lovin', hey?"

"Never mind pullin' the cork, old feller. All I want is for you to make this key fit my door lock. Cap'n Muras told me to tell you to do it. Look, it's bent."

Chips lost much of his ardor, but he made her sit down on his sea chest while he puttered with the key, and all the while he grinned and smirked at her lasciviously. He took a good stiff tot of rum himself, though she would have none of it; and he filed and wrenched at the key until he claimed it would fit, although she thought he ought to have tried it on the lock itself.

Peg was uneasy. She found herself in a situation that made her nervous and irritable. She was almost ready to fly to Sal-

vation Sam, confide in him, and put herself under his protection. She feared the day when Muras would be fully recovered.

"If this don't fit, you'll have Cap'n Muras on your neck!" she promised, taking her key and quitting Chips.

"If it don't fit, honey, come back," Chips snickered. "I'd do a lot for a purty gal like you!"

"You darned old goat!" she muttered under her breath, and groped back to where Toivo still stood.

The moon was higher, and its light flooded the ice. The vivid tints in the north were flaming into clear bands of rich color, waving, streaming, weaving. The tall Finn's face was a study in intensity. He did not turn as the girl stopped beside him. It startled her to hear him suddenly speak:

"Yu have spoke good words to me, Peggy. Ay shall bring yu golt and jewels, and yu shall buy silver fox furs, which Muras will never get. Ay have ta knife. Ay shall have ta power!"

Peg stole aft, shivering. Toivo was utterly mad—there was no doubt about it any longer. She cried out in fright when a dark shape intercepted her by the ladder. Then Salvation Sam placed his arm about her and smoothed her hair with his hand.

"I have waited for you, Peggy," he said softly. "I have neglected you, little one. Let us talk a while."

The kindly missionary was just the friend she needed, and with a sigh of real contentment she nestled into his sheltering arm. They stood against the break of the poop, under the ladder, screened from the cold, and secure against the curiosity of the mate on watch. Their voices were low. There was no reason for speaking loudly, since they had only themselves to talk about.

For an hour they remained there. The moonlight had almost invaded their nook when Peg abruptly broke away and ran up the ladder, laughing a hard little laugh, her face aflame in the moonlight. She darted past Mr. Coles, who had waited for an hour to catch her coming aft, and left him wheezing helplessly. When she got to her cabin, she flung herself down on the transom seat and laughed again.

She was thinking of Toivo Ranta. Toivo had been her first acquaintance of all the men aboard the Aurora. Toivo had been her friend, and it was on his account that she had ventured aboard the bark. Of all the men among whom she had been flung

here, from Muras down to Pineo, who was dead and gone, there was just one who had not in some fashion tried to make love to her; and that one was Toivo.

"And he's crazy!" she giggled.

XIV

MURAS was fully recovered when the bark sailed out of the ice, one tranquil evening, and coasted gently along a forbidding, iron-bound shore. For many days the crew had had hard work. There had been sawing parties out on the ice, cutting a lane for the ship. Other parties had carried out grapnels and kedges, burying the flukes in the solid ice. There had been gangs of toilers at the capstans, warping the bark through.

Strangely enough, the work had been carried on with amazing smoothness. Men sang at their heavy labor. They sang such songs as surely had never warped a ship along before:

"Oh, the devil and me, we can't agree—

Glory, hallelujah!

For I hate him and he hates me—

Glory, hallelujah!

Sing hallelujah, shout hallelujah! Glory, hallelujah!

I've been washed in Jesus' blood, glory, hallelujah!"

They hated the devil most cordially over a hundred miles of frozen sea. They wished they had the devil there. They howled "Amen" to the prayers of Salvation Sam as fervently as the missionary himself; and Sam had attained a fine fervor in the days that followed his evening interlude with Peggy under the poop ladder.

Peggy, too, had changed. At first she had regarded all the men with a sort of cheerful impudence. She looked upon Muras and Toivo as holding the keys to the riddle that she was pursuing when she came aboard the bark, so perhaps there was a slight difference in her attitude toward them; but Toivo was mad, and she was afraid of Muras since his astonishing escape from death and burial. The others did not frighten her, but they annoyed her.

She had refused to have anything more to do with the duties of steward. The doctor had donned a clean apron on the morning after he made his suggestion of a "little party," and that fact alone was enough to put Peggy on her guard. Chips had come aft to see in person what could be done about her door key. Mr. Soler took

care of Chips. The mate undertook to fit the key himself, and ordered Chips to keep out of the cabins, unless sent for. Peg got around that difficulty by taking off her lock altogether, and exchanging it for the pantry lock and key.

The next night she lay awake for a long time, watching the handle turn in her door and listening to stealthy footfalls and soft but sincere profanity. She did not tell Muras about it. She watched him, as she watched both mates at breakfast; and for the life of her she could not be sure which one of the three was her nocturnal visitant. She was frightened, and that very morning she told Muras that she would not act as steward any more.

"Let young Lute Slade do the work," she suggested. "He's the cleanest of the lot."

At that, Muras looked at her closely.

"What's that young farmer to you?" he demanded with an evil grin.

"What d'ye mean by that?" she flashed back at him. "Say, Ben Muras, out of all this shipful of wicked old goats, there's just two men that a woman's safe with, and Lute Slade's one. Get that? He's nothing to me—understand?"

Muras grinned rather less evilly.

"Don't blow up, cuty—don't blow up! Let him come aft as steward, then; but tell me"—he seized her arm, drew her to him, and raised her off her feet in a tremendous hug—"tell me who's the other man you feel safe with! Salvation Sam?"

"Guess again! You're off your course," she laughed, struggling in his grasp so that he let her down and whistled with sudden pain in his newly healed wound.

"You!" she cried mockingly, as she sped from the cabin to pass the word along to Lute Slade.

Lute had been stewarding for some little time when that tranquil evening arrived and found the bark placidly sailing along a forbidding coast in the dying air of a vanished breeze. He had contributed tremendously to Peggy's feeling of security, for he had been allowed to bring his bed and sea chest aft to the bunk provided for the steward.

He had made enemies. Mr. Coles had resented his advent, particularly after watching Peggy chat smilingly in the pantry doorway for twenty minutes immediately after she had reddened the second

mate's fat cheeks with her capable hands, to punish him for grabbing and kissing her unawares. Mr. Coles was not of a resentful type, however. He was fat and comfortable, and a kiss more or less meant little in his life. When the voyage was over, he would buy all the kisses he wanted, and there would be no slaps dealt, either.

Mr. Soler also resented Lute's coming aft, because he thought it would interfere with his own plans. He fondly believed that since Pineo's exit and Muras's illness he had progressed in Peg's affections; so he had small use for Lute Slade. However, since Muras so decreed, the mate had little to say about it.

Tyke Colomb was sore, too. It was not possible for him to see the smiles that Peg gave to Lute, but Tyke knew well enough that she would smile at any man who promised to serve her turn. He meant to watch, did Tyke; but always, when he thought of Lute Slade, he also thought of Mr. Soler, and then his gorge rose bitterly. He remembered that short and interrupted fight, which had been halted just when it was getting interesting.

All in all, there was plenty of warring material at large in the Aurora as she swam so gently forward, with her worn canvas lifting and swelling, flattening and volleying in the faintest of airs. Many miles ahead the grim coast line stretched, to terminate at last—to the eye, at least—in a towering bifurcated cliff, which plastered its black and white silhouette against the sky long after the sun had gone down.

On the poop stood Muras, eager and animated, pointing at the lofty headland, and chatting with the two mates in an unaccustomed vein of humor. On the forecabin stood Toivo, statuesque as ever, gazing, not at the point of land that interested Muras, but at the darkening heavens beyond it.

A few of the seamen were on deck, watching intently, for they had heard that the grim headland was the bark's destination; but they soon wearied of looking into the thickening gloom, and joined their shipmates in the forecabin, where Salvation Sam was warming up for a rousing revival meeting.

Tyke Colomb was steering, but his eyes were oftener upon the alluring figure of Peg Bolter than upon the compass. Peg gazed at the headland with a deep and calculating interest. From time to time she darted a glance forward at the tall Finn.

She did not have to glance at Muras, for he was passing and repassing perpetually, chattering to her or to the mates, and never caring whether he received answers or not; but she thought of him. There, in sight of all hands, lay the objective of the voyage; and in no more time than it would take the bark to come up with it she might know whether Muras or Toivo held the true key to the treasure that so intrigued her.

Then, suddenly, the heavens were no longer dark. A broad band of gorgeous light, containing all the colors of a peacock's flaunted tail, quivered sinuously across the northern sky. Wavering, gliding, darting rays of light from its upper edge, the aurora had all the creepy life of a fiery serpent; and detached patches of luminous quality, like small clouds, gave the effect of puffs of scorching breath from the serpent's nostrils.

A choking cry burst from the tall Finn, standing there alone on the forecastle, his body vaguely outlined against the glow. A sailor who had lingered outside saw it, and darted into the forecastle, yelling in panic. Another man looked out, and dodged back, howling.

There was a moment of hush inside, when even Salvation Sam's voice was stilled. Then the sailors' voices rose with fanatical fervor, Sam leading in a roar of ecstasy:

"Could I but stand where Moses stood, and view the landscape o'er.
Not Jordan's stream nor death's cold flood could fright me from that shore!"

Muras laughed aloud as the vocal flood surged aft to his ears. He had never believed that "getting religion" could so change a crowd of tough deep-water men. Their work while warping the bark through the ice had been a revelation to him.

Just now, however, he was more keenly interested in the actions of Toivo Ranta. Back and forth, back and forth, the boatswain paced, his figure outlined against the vivid light in the north. His restlessness seemed to indicate that the Aurora could not be far from the spot where the Ptarmigan had been nipped in the ice, and, after getting her furs out safely, had sunk, carrying her crew down with her while trying to get out her stores. Muras knew that the double headland was the landmark. From that point Toivo was to be the pilot.

"Boson!" Muras shouted. "Boson, lay aft!"

Toivo did not respond immediately. He halted in his pacing, but remained gazing at the dazzling spectacle in the sky.

"Boson!" Muras shouted again.

Toivo turned slowly and stalked aft, not to be hurried. He was looking upon the magic lights which meant so much to him. He mounted the short poop ladder. Peg, snuggling her small person in a corner of a weather cloth, watched with twin fires blazing in her dark eyes.

"Boson, we're almost there, ain't we?" asked Muras eagerly. "Take a look at the chart with me. Maybe we could make better time if we took the edge of the ice again, and moored to it. How about making sleds? The runners are all ready."

"Ay shall not need sleds," returned Toivo shortly; but he followed Muras into the chart room, and turned up the light over the board.

It was almost as if he were captain, and Muras his subordinate; but the skipper was too eager to notice that. Nor did he notice that Peg had left her shelter, and had followed the two men to the door of the chart room.

Together Muras and the boatswain pored over the chart; but every minute Toivo raised his shaggy head to gaze out toward those magic lights. Peg felt the thrill of the moment stealing over her. When the two men left the chart board, the destiny of the Aurora would be settled. If she could remain there unmolested so long, she would know whether Muras was seeking a treasure of furs or a will-o'-the-wisp.

"Ay have tolt yu there is no furs," said Toivo simply, frowning at the spot marked on the chart to represent the present position of the bark.

"Yes, yes," grinned Muras, willing to indulge the boatswain, who was evidently crazy, but who alone knew where the cargo of furs should be. The captain might humor him without believing him. "I know that, boson. You just take me to where the Ptarmigan was nipped—that's all. There's something else I want to make sure about."

"There's nothing else," was the level retort.

Muras swore. Then up came Lute Slade, to announce that supper was on the table.

"All right—I'll be down," snapped Muras, turning again to Toivo.

Mr. Coles looked at Mr. Soler, who nodded to him; and the fat second mate waddled off below, to the rare luxury of first cut at the dishes. The first mate glanced at Peggy, and beckoned her to join him; but she had no eyes for him. She was all eagerness concerning the chart.

Soler took her arm, but she flung him off, and moved over to the side of Lute, who stood staring through the door at the glorious heavens. The mate glared at her.

"Supper's ready, miss," he gritted, flashing a glance of precaution at Muras.

The captain crouched over the chart, avidly following Toivo's bony forefinger around the double peaked bluff. Muras was no more concerned about supper, or Soler, or Peg Bolter, than he was about the soul of the ship's cat. Lute Slade stood stock-still, staring with all his youthful ardor at the magnificent phenomenon illuminating the skies. Peg was close beside him, both her small hands grasping his arm.

"Stooard, get below and serve supper!" said the mate savagely, for he had nothing to fear from Muras just then.

Peg gave him a grimace of insolent defiance, and clutched Lute's arm tighter, so that the young fellow turned from the celestial spectacle to gaze down at her in colorful gratification. Tyke Colomb left the wheel, to creep nearer to the chart room, careless of detection in his eagerness to catch some inkling of what was going on there. Young Lute smiled, patting the girl's hands.

"Get to hell out o' this!" rasped Mr. Soler.

Gripping Lute by the neckband of his jacket, the mate hurled him off balance and hauled him through the door. Muras glanced up darkly, but it was merely in mild annoyance, and he swiftly returned to his chart.

"I'll learn you!" the mate panted, and struck Lute heavily on the temple with his brass knuckles, splitting the flesh and bringing the youngster to his knees, half stunned.

"You big sweep!" cried Peggy, flying at Soler with fingers curled to claw him, her eyes blazing like twin furies.

Muras straightened up now, and began to curse them. There was little time for cursing. What followed was like something flashed upon a screen for an instant and suddenly darkened out. Before Peg reached the mate with her finger nails,

young Lute staggered back to his feet. Blood ran from his temples, and he looked reproachfully at Soler, as he raised his closed fists to meet any further attack.

"You're my officer, sir, but no man—" Lute started to say.

The mate gripped the lad's arm again, and rained half a dozen blows on his face with the metal rings, so rapidly that Muras, who stepped forward to stop it, had not reached them before Lute's face was streaming with blood. The one thing Muras clearly recalled afterward was the sight of Tyke Colomb, dodging about the two men at grips, apparently animated by some purpose of his own. Then a small figure darted by him with a shrill scream, brushed by Toivo for a breathless second, and flew into the bloody mêlée. There was a flash of steel. Mr. Soler grunted heavily, let go of Lute, half turned to gaze in astonishment at his own red blood pouring down his front from his gaping throat, and sank slowly to his feet.

"Here's yer knife, Toivo! I showed the big bruiser, didn't I?" panted Peg Bolter, holding out the boatswain's dripping blade.

"You've killed him!" cried Muras.

Peg shrugged her shoulders. She was wiping blood from Lute Slade's eyes, so that he might see to get below to clean himself.

"Is ta mate dead?" asked Toivo, with a suspicion of interest in his colorless tone.

Muras nodded. The boatswain stepped over to the staring Tyke, coolly took the sheath knife that hung at the sailor's hip, and as coolly started to cut another notch in the bloody haft of his own fatal weapon.

"Eight!" he muttered. His cold blue eyes glittered as they left his task, to gaze again to the northward. "Eight!"

XV

EVEN Salvation Sam's hot brand of religion was powerless to combat the excitement that followed Tyke Colomb's account of the killing of Soler.

"I allus said that judy 'd git somebody yet!" grumbled Eke Paral, who had once had his leathery face well slapped simply because he had offered to show Peg the stars.

"She's a limb o' Satan!" vowed Raupo, who vividly remembered the scalding she gave him with a ladleful of soup, just for pouting his cracked lips at her across the galley while she was nursing Muras.

"Seems like one sinner slipped by Salvation Sam'l," growled another uneasy sailorman.

There was a turbulent tide of concern over the condition that had abruptly arisen regarding Toivo, the Finn, and his curious knife.

"He's stark mad now!" Tyke blurted out. "Not just crazy, like he was. He's got eight notches in that blasted knife, an' there's only one to get. Hell!"

"Maybe there's summat in it, arter all," muttered Sam's shakiest convert. "What if his yarn's true, mates?"

"That's what I say," added Tyke eagerly.

"What do Sam say?" demanded Limehouse, with the loyalty of self-interest.

"To hell with Sam, I say!" came a rusty but ready voice out of the shadows.

"There's one more river, and that's the river o' Jordan;
One more river—there's one more river to cross!"

Chips came in singing. His song stopped at first glimpse of the huddled crowd that split so guiltily at his entry.

"Hello, lads! Rouse up! I want a hand to help with the stiff. Don't be afeared—ain't goin' to be no merrickle this time!"

"Is 'e proper dead?" whispered a timorous brother.

"Ask yerself," cackled Chips. "That hellcat stuck him in the neck, didn't she? The mad Finn's cut his notch good an' deep. He don't make no mistakes, the Finn don't!"

"That's what we wuz talkin' over, Chips," spoke up an excited sailor. "Do you believe Toivo's got what he says he's got?"

"I don't know nothing, my lad," snapped Chips. "All I knows is I want a hand to parcel up the mate. I don't know nothing about fairy tales and sich. Come on! Who's comin'?"

"Aye, you may talk that way, but if it's true what he says, Chips, he's only lackin' one notch, and he's proper loony—you said so. What's to stop him clappin' that knife o' his into some pore bloke offhand like—maybe at the burial? I ain't goin'!"

Tyke volunteered this time, for he had a deep and gnawing imp of inquisitiveness lodged within him. There was more and more to be cogitated upon concerning Toivo Ranta and what he might do next.

They found Mr. Coles on the poop, looking as if he could not decide whether to feel alarmed at the tragedy or elated over the promotion that had unexpectedly come to him. The aurora had died out from the sky, and only a few glimmering lanterns shed an uncertain radiance over the deck. The bark creaked and sighed in every plank and timber, every rope and ghostly sail, as she rolled gently on a tranquil sea with the faintest swell underrunning her, wafting along before a breathing air scarcely strong enough to lift the canvas.

Sharp-ruled against the night, to starboard, the line of the ice ran parallel to the vessel's course. The great bluff that lay ahead was swathed in velvety blackness. At intervals the bark dipped her bows more deeply, and lifted them, to make the stillness ripple with the musical tinkling of brine from her chain bobstays. Each drop could be heard, so still was the night.

Against the faint loom of the foresail, to windward, the gaunt shape of Toivo could be made out, rigid and awful in its immobility. The boatswain's uncovered head, all shaggy and wind-blown, never touched by a comb since the big breeze, was stonily turned toward the unseen headland.

Chips and Tyke went below. They returned quickly, carrying the body. Salvation Sam, who had been praying beside it, accompanied them.

"Cap'n Muras told us to parcel him up on deck, and to give him a shove off as soon as he's snugged down," Chips told Mr. Coles, who began to wheeze some protest.

They laid Soler across the closed skylight, and Sam Hewes knelt on the deck.

"Lord, when you've raked over this poor soul, and given him credit for the bit o' good that was in him, add a bit more out of your loving-kindness before you set the balance against his sins," Sam prayed. "Don't let him sail down to hell just because he was cut down in the heat of anger. Lord, look with pity upon the frail little sinner who did this murder."

Immediately beneath the skylight sat Lute Slade, his mangled face upturned to the lamplight. Peg was seated on the table, with salves and soft cotton and fresh bandages to soothe the lad's cruel hurts. At first Lute had refused to let her forego her supper, and had crudely tied up his own face; but in fifteen minutes from the time of the beating, he could neither see, nor open his lips, nor breathe through his nos-

trils without holding them open with his fingers.

He could hear, however, and Sam's loud prayers came to him, bringing home to him his first knowledge of the lurid truth. Only vaguely had he understood that the mate was dead. He had been so blinded and bewildered, while Soler was beating him, that he had seen nothing clearly, and but vaguely realized that steel had been used.

"Peggy, is that true what he's sayin'?" he mumbled, parting his swollen lips with two fingers.

Peg had heard what he had heard, and was gone. Lute groped for her, but her place was warm and empty. Peg was at the skipper's door. Not waiting to knock or call, she flung open the door, surprising Muras in the middle of making log entries.

"Hello, little spitfire!" he grinned at her. "I was just going to put your name down in my big book. Come on in!"

"Don't be smart!" she retorted furiously. "You got to stop that fool sky pilot yawpin' over my head about murderin' people. I didn't murder Soler. It was comin' to him; and if I did, I'm damned glad of it, so chew on that! But you got to choke off that prayin' fool up there. How d'ye think I can bandage poor Lute up, listenin' to that guff?"

Muras got up and bawled through the skylight an order to cut short the prayers until the time for burial. Then he came back, to take Peg by the arm and thrust her inside his cabin. He closed the door, and at sight of his face her fierce protest petered out and died.

"Let me finish Lute's bandages," she pleaded quietly. "His face is all raw out there."

"Listen to me first!" he retorted, and fixed her with a gaze that caused her own bright eyes to widen.

In all her experience with men—and she had outbrazened some hard cases—she had never encountered any man who had made her feel as she felt before Muras. The captain had never affected her in this way before, either. He had made love to her, roughly, masterfully, and she had been able to laugh at him. He had only warmed her blood and filled her with fight; but now he caused a chilly ripple to touch every vertebra of her spine.

"Listen to me, Peggy—there's going to be a showdown. You run this ship pretty much to suit yourself, don't you? You slap

a guy's face or pat his cheek, just as you feel like. You've done both to me. Now I don't share my girl with no young squirt of a farmer. You get that chap bandaged up, and forget him."

"You got a crust!" Peg cried angrily.

Muras stopped her.

"Forget him, I say! To-morrow we reach the place we started out for, and some things 'll happen. You're going to be my sweetie, see; so the sooner you understand that the better. I've been patient for—"

"You'll be patient some more!" retorted Peggy, reaching for the door. "Of all the old goats in this ship, if I had to pick one, you'd be away down the list!"

Muras darted out a long arm and swung her from the door.

"I'm the old goat for you, my girl, or down you go in the log as a murderer! I'll clap you in irons, and see you hanged for Soler! So go back and tie up the steward, and put the damper on any flame that's burning for him in that hot little breast of yours, my dear. Come, be a sport, Peggy! You can't go on this way all the time. What d'you think men are, anyhow, letting a pretty wench run loose like you've been doing? You don't want to be hanged, do you? I'd a sight rather see you dancing a fandango in red silk tights than doing a hornpipe on nothing at the end of one string, even if you wore furs. Run along, now, and think it over."

"Do you know that your first mate's dead and waitin' for burial?" she flashed at him, with a swift recovery; "and you settin' there and talking slush to me!"

"I know, Peggy; but thanks for reminding me," he chuckled. "You certainly look like a queen, all reddened up like that! Your eyes, too, look like a cat's in the dark. I got a heavy crush on you, cuty. Come to me soon! Don't worry about a funeral more or less now. There'll be others yet, I feel pretty sure."

"You're dead right!" she retorted, and flung out of the cabin, to go to Lute again.

XVI

THERE was no wind. A boat's crew had carried out two anchors and buried a fluke of each in the thick ice; and now two gangs were walking around two capstans, hauling the bark alongside the floe, to moor her. Poor Soler had slipped down into the shivery green depths, wafted on his long journey by a fervid oration from Salvation Sam.

Lute Slade was carrying on his stewardship, all swathed and plastered like a mummy. Otherwise there was little to remind the crew of the *Aurora* that another man had died.

Tyke Colomb headed the gang at the after capstan, while Salvation Sam led the party on the forecastle head. There had been no separation by watches, no splitting of gangs by orders. The men had spontaneously divided up and followed the two leaders, and Tyke had more men on his handspikes than had Sam.

Wide was the difference in the chanteys with which they lightened their labors. Sing out they must, no matter that the mate's funeral had but just passed. Salvation Sam wanted his gang to sing, for he was in a fine frenzy of godly fervor, and his men had faltered. Tyke Colomb wanted his men to sing, because he had to combat the influence that Sam had acquired over them. Besides, when once they got stirred up and hot, they would not notice him so closely if he shirked his weight a bit; and he wanted to keep close watch on Toivo, who was busily employed with Chips, amidships, about some business which suggested a long journey over the ice.

"Roll the old chariot along!

Roll the old chariot along,
And we won't lag on behind.

If the devil's in the road, we'll roll it over him!

If the devil's in the road, we'll roll it over him,
And we won't lag on behind!"

The forecastle capstan pawls rattled cheerily to the swinging rhythm. The bark crawled ahead, stretching the hawser taut. Her sails were hauled down or clewed up, waiting to be furled. Far across the ice two seals were crawling lazily. Nearer at hand a curious bear sniffed at the protruding anchor fluke, and pawed it with four-inch claws.

The morning had a bright, clean quality utterly at variance with the atmosphere surrounding the bark. Sam's old revival song, doing duty for a capstan chantey forward, was bright and ringing; but in the men's singing there was a suspicion of frenzy that was not altogether suggestive of sunshine and clear skies.

"Come on, bullies! Them gospel sharks is haulin' the oakum out o' you!" growled Tyke, turning from a long scrutiny of a newly completed sled, which Toivo had just dropped on the deck with a clatter. Tyke

led off with a song more like the customary sailors' ditties:

"In Amsterdam there lived a maid—
Mark well what I do say!
In Amsterdam there lived a maid,
And she was mistress of her trade—"

There was a crashing explosion, and the men stopped singing and heaving as if the shot had stricken them all dead. Tyke Colomb saw Toivo leap a foot clear of the deck, his hand gripping his knife, his cold blue eyes balefully flashing toward the poop. There Muras stood, rifle at shoulder, aiming a second time at the inquisitive bear. The bear was sniffing at the spot where the first bullet had struck.

Before firing a second shot Muras caught a glimpse of the consternation he had caused, and lowered his rifle with a loud laugh. At that human sound the bear shuffled off along the ice past the bark's stern.

"Heave away there!" shouted Muras.
"You ain't being shot at—not yet!"

"Ay think yu are mad!" muttered Toivo, dropping his knife back into the sheath and resuming his work.

"G'wan, lads—heave away an' give 'er hell!" growled Tyke.

"I slipped my arm about her waist—

Mark well what I do say!

I placed my arm about her waist;

She said, 'Young man, you're in great haste!'

I'll go no more a roving with you, fair maid!"

Now a yell came from forward, and that capstan stopped turning. Toivo turned nervously. Muras was already staring through his glasses at something astern of the bark, at which all hands forward were looking in evident fear. The bark's bows gently touched the ice, and her stern was still angled off, so that every man on deck could follow along the line of sight, if he chose to stand up and look.

The inquisitive bear stood at the edge of the ice, pawing at something that bobbed in the water. Every time the big paw struck it, the claws caught, and the object rose a few inches from the sea, only to break loose and submerge again. So it went on, bobbing up and down, the bear playing with it like a cat, hooking it and losing it.

Suddenly Muras uttered an evil laugh, and stepped to the saloon companionway.

"Peggy!" he shouted down. "Peggy! Hurry up and see this! It 'll give you a good laugh. Hurry up—you may not see the like again!"

Peggy ran up, hastily pulling on her coat and mittens, all alive with curiosity. She stared. All hands stared; but the distance was too great for the naked eye. Muras handed her his binoculars, and showed her how to focus them, grinning down at her meanwhile.

She found the bear, and looked intently. Muras laughed aloud, for she turned pale, dropped the glasses, and tottered so that he stepped in to hold her. She had seen the head of the dead mate, released from the depths because his weights had dropped through rotten canvas, his face hideously streaked by the playful bear's claws, bobbing up and down, up and down, slowly turning, until the awful face looked straight at Peggy.

"Next time you're tending the steward's face, you won't forget that, will you?" Muras hissed at her, as he led her to the stairs.

His own face was alight with triumph when he took up the glasses again. He did not reproach the carpenter for using rotten canvas, as he had at first intended to do. He watched the ghastly object go down deep under an impatient punch from the bear, and it did not reappear. Some submerged corner of ice had caught it and given it merciful sepulture. The example would not be lost on Peg Bolter.

"What's the matter with your after gang, Mr. Coles?" Muras abruptly demanded, turning from the scene. "Get the ship moored! Get her moored!"

Mooring the Aurora securely called for a shifting of anchors, and the placing of another one. Toivo took a boarding ax and tramped off along the ice. Mr. Coles sweated and wheezed with uneasiness, as he strove to get men to move as if they had life in them. Every man wanted to break out the new anchor, or to stand by the capstan—anything rather than follow the Finn out on the ice.

The colossal bear had elected to stay near by. Robbed of his plaything, not apparently famishing for food, he loitered within easy loping distance, pawing at holes in the ice, thrusting down his curious snout, and then blowing water all about him. When Toivo began to chop away at the already frozen stern anchor, Bruin looked interested again, and shuffled toward the Finn.

Toivo paid no attention to the beast, but flogged away with his ax, hurling chunks

of hard ice broadcast in showers. The bear soon stopped, shaking his magnificent head and shoulders in annoyance at the swarming missiles, which only tickled him. Soon he began to roll over and over, rubbing his nose and eyes with his forepaws.

Toivo thrust the ax handle through his belt, bent his strong back, and tugged the kedge out of the ice. Then, not deigning to wait for help, he dragged it along to the place pointed out for it.

"There! Look! Even the bloody bears won't touch him!" shouted Tyke Colomb. "Me fer him!"

A few men followed Tyke with the third anchor, gaining courage as they saw the bear shamble away across the ice toward the clear-cut horizon. By the time the last anchor was placed, and the warps had to be hauled in again, men had to be called aboard to man the capstans. Unknown to himself—and unappreciated, if known—the boatswain had gained a willing following, ready to believe whatever he told them to believe.

"Tell the steward to pack up some grub and rum, Mr. Coles, and have four o' your huskiest bullies ready to go along with boson and me for a little sled ride."

Tyke was a volunteer, and there was no need to call for others, since that experience with the bear. The party was quickly formed, the sled stood ready on the ice alongside the bark, and Muras waited with what patience he could feign for Toivo.

During the past few hours the boatswain had taken upon himself a grim and mystifying air of detachment. Muras, fuming, promised himself full satisfaction for it at the proper time—which would not be too far distant.

Toivo at last swung himself down from the ship's side, and strode off ahead of the sled. Muras seated himself under the blankets and waved a hand to the four seamen, evidently expecting them to take hold and pull him.

Tyke glared, and so did the other three. The men left behind on the Aurora, suddenly enlightened, roared approving merriment at their shipmates' disillusionment. Muras cursed them hotly.

"Well, what are ye waiting for?" he snarled. "Expect to ride?"

Tyke seized a line, the rest sullenly followed, and the sled slipped away to the northward in the tracks of the long-striding Finn.

On the bark, Salvation Sam seized the moment to revive the cooling fervor of his flock. There was no work to be done until the sled came back. Mr. Coles took himself off below, as soon as the party started, to toast himself before the fire, smoke his pipe, sip hot grog, and follow Peg Bolter's every movement with his eyes—in short, to spend a few hours in as near a sailor's heaven as was possible aboard a ship moored to an ice field.

Lute Slade stumbled at his work, able to grope his way about, but seeing imperfectly. Peggy kept clear of him. She had a vivid imagination, and Muras had omitted ambiguities from his speech regarding her attentions to the battered young farmer. She looked to his hurts, and could not help warming to his honest, boyish gratitude. When he lightly touched her hand with his swollen and bruised lips, she felt choky; but she characteristically cautioned him.

"Don't you get mushy, now, or I'll leave you to mend yer own clock! Gee, but you look funny! Any girl would fall for you!"

Perhaps the gentle slap she placed on Lute's bandaged cheek softened her derision; but she did not linger with him after the last strip of adhesive was stuck on. She had to pass Mr. Coles several times, and gradually she grew fearful of him, sitting there stolidly puffing his pipe, or sipping his hot grog, or for the moment doing neither, but always fixing her with unwinking eyes that bulged out of his fat face like gooseberries.

At length there came faintly to her ears the rising flood of Salvation Sam's opening hymn. She sped from the cabin, not waiting for wraps, darted along the main deck, almost stricken down by the terrific cold, and burst into the forecastle like a storm-driven bird.

"The winds and the waves shall obey my will—
Peace, be still! Peace, be still!"

Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea,
Or demons, or men, or whatever they be,
No waters can swallow the ship where lies
The Master of ocean and earth and skies.

They all shall sweetly obey my will—
Peace, be still! Peace, be still!"

Peggy entered midway through that stirring stanza, when Sam was singing alone. All the men joined in the closing lines, and three pairs of soulful eyes vied in beaming peacefully upon the girl as three sailors tried simultaneously to offer her the book from which all three were singing.

"Keep your old book and leave me alone!" she muttered fiercely in their faces, and sidled over to a place beside Salvation Sam.

Sam placed an arm about her shoulders, and carried on with his singing. In the next verse there was a fervor that had been lacking before. Men who had temporarily fallen from grace rallied around the missionary's standard again, singing at the utmost pitch of their pipes. More than one found it impossible to sing so far from the circle, and crowded closer, singing down at Peggy with forceful vehemence.

"Sam, I'm in trouble," she whispered, when the hymn was done. "I got to talk to you or bust."

She began to talk, at first to Sam, then to others, as they gathered near, until presently the meeting was broken up as a religious meeting, and developed into a demonstration of sympathy. When she departed, an hour later, there were men left behind her who vowed that all they needed to storm the north pole and bring it to her was just her word.

"On'y give us a 'int, Peggy, my dear—o'ny give us a 'int!" Limehouse called after her.

XVII

In the galley, at early dusk, there was a gathering of men who were very much in earnest.

The sled had not returned. Mr. Coles appeared on deck for a very brief glance around, ordered a lantern to be hung up in the rigging, and went back to the bright warmth of the saloon and a cozy supper with Peggy.

With the gathering darkness, the northern skies began to put on their nightly glory, and the bark seemed to dance in the wild radiance of the aurora. Patches of snow on boats and houses glowed pink and green and blue. The hanging sails, left unfurled, were alive with rippling shadows and lights. Against the darker loom of the opposite quarter of the heavens the galley stovepipe loomed redly, and specks of fire marked the thick column of rising smoke.

Some of the men were eating their supper forward, but most of them carried along their plates and pannikins and ate their rations in the galley. Astonishingly, the doctor seemed agreeable to their doing so.

"What do you think, Chips?" he asked abruptly, turning from a long scrutiny of

the flaming aurora and removing his pipe from his lips.

"Think? Me?" grunted Chips, through a vast mouthful of salt hake overly full of bones. "About what, you old fool?"

"About them there," replied the doctor, pointing northward with his pipestem.

"About what?" snapped Chips, fishing with a hooked finger for a fish bone that had got behind his teeth.

"Them roarin' ballyaluses."

Chips choked down his food after drawing out the bone, and gulped angrily. There was a sturdy sound of hungry jaws mangling tough and briny fish. Many deep-set, sea-keen eyes were fixed on the doctor, though many sea-hungry mouths were too well employed to add words to the scrappy discussion.

"What of 'em?" demanded Chips. "You set out to know all about 'em, didn't you?"

"Aye, but I dunno so much," confessed the doctor slowly, sucking hard on his pipe again. "You seen how that bear never paid no 'tention to the boson, didn't you?"

"I did, doctor," piped up Limehouse eagerly. "I seen it with me own eyes. I says, watch that Finn—that's what I says!"

"Shut up, lousy!" growled a hitherto silent sailorman who had been wondering all the voyage what the voyage was all about. "Let men talk!"

"I am a man, gorblimy, an' a good—" Limehouse started to squeal.

The silent sailor clapped a hand like the shell of a spanker sheet block over the yapping mouth.

"I ain't one o' them blokes as knows it all, Chips," the doctor was going on. "We all got to learn; and we all see plenty o' queer things come to pass along o' that Finn and his blessed knife." The doctor glanced all around the group, a little uncertainly. "What if that guff's true," he ventured, lowering his voice, "about Toivo havin' the key to a treasure? The Finn believed it as if it was gospel. We thinks he's crazy, but do crazy folks go crazy in the same way he's crazy?"

"Oh, 'vast yammerin', and spit out what's on your mind!" growled Chips, his supper eaten, and his interest awakening. "So many crazys in yer talk, you sound half batty yerself!"

"What's them roarin' ballyaluses got to do with it, doc?" the silent sailor wanted to know.

"I'll tell yer all I knows, bullies. Draw yer own ideas," the doctor said importantly.

"I got this through more'n one mouth, you understand. Pineo, Tyke Colomb, Peggy—smart gal is Peggy—all put a bit to it. The main thing is, Toivo knows of a treasure that's buried under them blessed lights out there. Queer chaps is Finns, but you all knows they ain't the same as us. I been shipmates with Finns as would bring a head wind on when they wasn't treated right, or didn't like the skipper. They'd just stick their knife into the foremast—that's all. There it would stay until they got good and ready to stop the head wind. Then they'd haul the knife out, and the wind would come fair. I've seen it!"

"Me, too," piped Limehouse. "I seen—"

"Plenty of us 'as seen it," interrupted the silent sailor. "Go on, doc."

"But I never thought much about the knife before. Don't it stand to reason they ain't got or'nary knives? You all seen that knife of Toivo's?"

"But them roarin' ballyaluses?" persisted the silent one.

"Don't try to 'urry me. I'm coming to that. If that knife of his is a magic blade, then there might be something in the way that big Finn been doin' nothing but stare to the nor'ard until he seen them lights. Didn't you all see his eyes when fust he seen 'em?"

"You got the tarry end o' the stick," the silent sailor put in bluntly. "I ain't sure the boson's so crazy. There ain't any fairies these days—no more'n there's mermaids."

"There is mermaids. I seen 'em!" vociferated Limehouse. "Down in the Sargasso Sea—"

The interrupted speaker again clapped a hand over the little cockney's mouth, and went on:

"But sometimes there is something in treasure yarns. Sometimes a secret spring opens when you done the proper thing, and there's a bit o' parchment, or human skin, or something, as tells you where to look for the stuff as was buried. How d'ye know Toivo ain't watchin' that roarin' ballyalus until it gets so high in the sky? Then he'll know about where he's at. We ought to be in on it, whatever 'tis. He's only lackin' one notch now."

"And he's out there on the ice with Cap'n Muras!" the doctor burst forth.

"You chaps is all wet," Raupo put in

contemptuously. "Never mind about them bein' out there. Did the boson ever stick anybody, for the sake of another notch? He didn't. When he stuck Pineo, 'twas in a fair fight. 'Twas Tyke as stuck pore old Poke Bonnet—"

"And he's out there along with 'em!"

"You're all up the pole," Eke Paral chimed in. "The Finn's mad as a Red Sea sand flea. I don't believe there's a darned thing in that stuff he pulls. More to the mark if we got together an' cut in on the furs Muras is after. What's double wages for a v'yage like this? I says shares—that's what I says. How about it?"

"If you ask me, mates, I don't believe there's any furs for Muras or anybody else," Chips stated positively.

There was an outcry at that. Why did Chips think a man would fit out a bark the size of the Aurora, unless he knew what he was after? What crazy loon would pay double wages to a full crew to go on a wild-goose chase?

Chips only wagged his head stolidly.

"I ain't like you blokes—I don't know everything," he said with fine sarcasm. "Doctor says he don't, but he means he do. After all, what do he know? He yammers a lot about magic knives and roarin' bally-aluses, but he don't know no more about 'em than that wench Peggy knows about christenin's. Here's what I know—that wench didn't come aboard here for nothin'. She ain't that sort. She's smart as paint, too, is that same judy—too smart for the likes of us. She come aboard here to clean up, didn't she? Do she have any truck with any of you? Who do she cotton to? It ain't Muras. If the Finn's crazy, she's crazy, too. Make yer own bets, bullies!"

Uproar broke out again. There were men who still had hope of achieving Peggy's favor—some who had not tried their hand, but meant to; some at whom she had smiled—saucily. These held aloof, like superior folks, sure that when the rabble had been properly set in its place she would be theirs for the taking. Peggy Bolter was assailed, defended, reviled, and lauded to the flaming skies in such a babel that the galley literally belched sound.

The meeting soon broke up, for the doctor picked up his tormentors—the murderous hooked prongs that he used to fish hunks of salt horse from the boiler—and proceeded to clean out the place.

"Don't make no difference! I tell you

there ain't no furs as Muras thinks there is!" yelled Chips, backing out fighting, and taking himself off forward.

Salvation Sam stayed in the forecandle, reading Bible stories to the few men who had not gone to the galley. The missionary's face was haggard and deeply lined, and his eyes, sunken like pools under the eaves of his brows, gleamed somberly. There was a deep thrill in his rich voice. He read parables, tales of wandering sheep, of prodigal sons, of the disciple of little faith who, essaying to walk on the sea, got more than his feet wet.

One by one the crowd from the galley drifted in, and soon Sam's attentive audience was murmurous with whispered discussion. As the murmuring rose, so did the voice of Salvation Sam, until he was roaring forth at the full height of his oratorical powers—not parables, not pleasant Bible stories, but one of his own hair raising exhortations to wayward sinners.

"Ye sons of Belial!" he thundered, crashing a fist down upon the lid of a sea chest. "Repent, lest ye burn like oil in hell! I hear you! I know the words you mutter are evil words. I need no ears for that. My eyes can tell me what your mouths are saying. Fools! Where are your prayers and promises of yesterday? I say to you now, here, in this dark and dirty place, which reeks with your wallowings—hogs that you are!—I say to you that unless you heave your sinfulness overboard and bend your marrowbones before Almighty God, there's a specially red-hot place in the southeast corner of hell all sizzling and spitting for you! Come here, all of you! I'll stir your immortal souls with song!"

"You're a bit off, parson," grumbled a delinquent, who had not shaken off Sam's influence entirely. "We washes the fo'c's'le twice a week. It's too cold to change clo'es."

"Don't mind 'im, Sam—let's sing," whimpered Limehouse, creeping in under Sam's arms to look at the book.

"Let the beautiful words of this hymn take root in your hearts," said Sam, very much more quietly, and led off singing with fervor:

"Christ, the blessed one, gives to all
Wonderful words of life!"

There was poor response until he launched out in the refrain. By then, if he had

not regained sway himself, his tranquilizing hymn, with its catchy tune, had taken hold of the men through sheer love of music:

"Words of life and beauty,
Teach me faith and duty,
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful
words of life!

Midway through the last verse of the hymn a loud and angry hail came in through the circular ventilator in the door. The men stopped singing, looking at each other slyly. The hail came again.

"Come on, mates! The sled's come back!" yelled Chips outside.

"In an instant Sam's meeting was broken up, even as the doctor's had been, and the forecastle was empty of all save the missionary. Even Limehouse scuttled with the rest, for there must be news to hear.

Muras was already disappearing through the saloon doors. Tyke and his mates slung the sled and the other stuff aboard sullenly, while the boatswain stood out there on the glimmering ice, staring back over the sled tracks toward the twin-peaked headland, behind which the arc of the aurora seemed to come down to earth.

Of a sudden, while all hands clustered about the returned party at the rail, the serpentine bands of the aurora shot long rays earthward, and the heavens were full of an awe-inspiring electrical crackling, like the distant crackling of burning twigs—millions of twigs.

"My Gawd!" gasped Limehouse, and fell to his knees at Salvation Sam's feet, hiding his face.

The leaping rays of awful splendor darted and withdrew, broadened and vanished, in incessant motion, as if the weaving, undulating band from which the rays shot were coming down to the bark itself. All the while that mysterious crackling persisted, louder, louder, and seemingly nearer, nearer.

"Howly Savior!" cried a frightened sailor, scurrying to the other side of the ship.

The deck hummed with murmurings. Salvation Sam stood by, secretly hoping that the men would accept this celestial visitation as a sign; but the chief interest of the sailors was centered upon the tall, bare-headed figure out there on the ice. Toivo's stony face was upturned, his blue eyes glittered, his hands were stretched out in ecstasy to the heavens.

The aurora faded, and the boatswain came on board. His face was alight as he came within the glow of the deck lantern, and the strange and mystic smile on his rough-hewn features arrested the attention of all who saw him. Men who had thought to speak to him held aloof, for he came into the circle of the galley light with his knife balanced on one mittened hand, as if about to throw it, and his light blue eyes were fixed upon it in fascination.

The men gathered around Tyke Colomb and his mates, instead, asking for news.

"Ain't no news!" Tyke growled. "If you ask me, there ain't nothing except them bloody lights in the sky."

"What? No furs, Tyke?"

"Ask Muras!" Tyke retorted, and took himself off to the forecastle, followed by his two comrades of the sled trip.

Salvation Sam hovered near the galley crowd, too, for he was human enough to want to hear whether there was a prospect that the Aurora's guest would be successful. Deep in his heart he felt that the bark was like a caldron of bitter brew, all but ready to boil over. A successful trip would make the brew less bitter, even if it did not prevent the boiling over.

Peggy came running along from aft, and Sam stepped to meet her. She was bare-headed, and her coat flew open, though the air was bitterly keen. She gave no heed to anybody, or to the cold, but flew straight to the boatswain and threw her arms upon his shoulders, with her small, eager face upturned to his, while the men gaped curiously. She made no secret of her interest, either. This, for one, was the real Peg Bolter.

"Tell me, Toivo, did he find it?" she chattered impatiently.

The Finn smiled down at her, with one great hand patting her shoulders, while the other hand returned the knife to its sheath.

"To-morrow, little friend, Ay shall make yu a queen!" he said in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice—which, however, held a little thrill.

Peg stared into his face with snapping eyes and parted red lips, but remained silent before his tremendous sincerity. The men gathered nearer, too, awed by his aspect of confident victory.

"Ay have seen it. It is here. To-morrow Ay shall bring yu a golt ring, and yu shall have half ta earth, Peggy, for yu have been my good friend!"

Toivo stood her off at arm's length and smiled gently down at her. Something in his gaze stopped the torrent of words that came to her lips, and she only shook his hand. Slowly she turned to go aft.

At every step she took, men sidled up to her.

"Don't fergit, Peggy, I'm yer friend! Call on me, if anybody gits gay wi' yer!" a sailor offered hoarsely. "You know me. Only sing out, lass, an' I'm right there!"

"You know me, Peg!" muttered another.

These men had all been aspiring lovers. Now they aspired just as eagerly to be her champions.

When she had passed below, and they gathered in the forecastle, there was but one topic of discussion, and that was Toivo's treasure.

"Tyke says there ain't no furs!"

"Ye're a liar! I on'y said I don't believe there is," growled Tyke. "Muras come back mad as hell. The Finn stuck to it there wasn't no furs, that the Ptarmigan took 'em down with her when she sunk, and that he had allus said so. They're goin' out again to-morrow."

"Let 'em go!" said a man in the darkest corner. "I knows how I bets. The Finn's got the dope. That noise in the sky was something to do with it, mark my words! I'm for Toivo an' that gal."

"Foller the gals, an' you can't go wrong, if it's loot ye're arter!" vowed a wry-faced ruffian, who looked as if following the girls had got very little loot for him.

XVIII

PEGGY stole back to her tiny berth, while Muras stamped and swore as he changed his clothes in his stateroom opposite. Lute Slade piled fuel on the fire, and there was a rich aroma of hot toddies, which, with the fruity reek of Mr. Coles's pipe, filled the saloon with a blue haze of comfortable intensity under the low beams.

A few scattered snowflakes dusted the skylight glass from time to time, and drifted off. They did not melt, for all the cozy warmth within. It was far too cold outside for that. Some flakes found lodgment against the frame, and gradually the snows accumulated until the glass was nearly covered.

Muras glanced up as he entered the saloon, and scowled.

"Damn and blast the snow!" he swore. "Always something putting my plans out!"

Flinging himself heavily into a chair before the fire, he drank down a tumbler of steaming rum, and stretched out his legs to the ruddy glow. Whittling at a plug of tobacco, he stared at his slipped feet a while before he appeared to realize that Mr. Coles was not evincing any keen interest. Moreover, the mate was huddled very comfortably indeed in his own chair, and had not moved when the skipper joined him. There was rum in Mr. Coles's glass, and his pipe burned freely and placidly.

"I said damn and blast the snow! You deaf?" Muras snarled.

The mate slowly turned upon the skipper a round, bovine eye and a red, shining face. He looked as if he had done himself very well indeed with the skipper's rum in the skipper's absence.

"All right!" he said wheezily. "What of it? It don't snow in here."

Muras glared furiously, but the fat mate deliberately turned to the fire again.

"If it snows, we can't go out to-morrow!" the captain snapped.

Mr. Coles maintained his stolid indifference. Muras could stand it no longer.

"Hell's hobs! Can't you show a little interest in the ship's business, you lump o' lard?"

"Interest in ship's business, Cap'n Muras? How have I neglected my duties?"

The round, bovine gaze had a lofty dignity which did not fit the fat, round face.

"Can't you show interest in my sled trip?" insisted the captain.

"Oh, I see!" drawled Coles. "May I ask, cap'n, how that concerns me, or any o' the hands? Nobody's on shares, that I know of. I signed on at wages, if I remember—fair wages, but wages just the same; and so did all hands. We signed on at wages for a round trip, asking no questions. I ain't asking any, am I?"

"The damned Finn says there's no cache o' furs!" stuttered the skipper.

"Furs? I know nothing about furs. If I remember right, the boatswain always said that."

"But he lies!" stormed Muras. "Would I have fitted this bark out to come up here unless there was some real dope to go on? Would I?"

"For my part, I think you'd have done better to ship at least your mates on shares," puffed Mr. Coles. "There's interest in shares."

Muras fumed and snorted for several minutes. He called Lute, ordered more grog, and drank a full tumbler before he reopened the subject.

When Lute had shut his pantry door, Mr. Coles looked up with the first trace of interest that he had yet shown to Muras.

"The wench is sweet on that cripple," he gurgled through the steam of his grog. "You see, cap'n, I'm watching out for your interests."

"She must ha' cuffed your fat face!" chuckled Muras. "But never you mind about my wench, and never you mind about Lute. When time comes, I have a nice little party planned for Lute, and for the big Finn, and for some others as don't suit me. Just now I'm going to take you in this fur business on shares, Coles. Then perhaps you'll wake up to other things besides grog and girls. If Soler hadn't died, you'd be out of luck, for he was twice the man you are. I'd have taken him. However, listen. There's a cargo of silver foxes somewhere nigh that headland. I'll give the Finn a day or so more to make good, and then—"

"Wait a minute!" wheezed Coles. "You heard a yarn about the furs being cached before the Ptarmigan got nipped and sunk. How d'ye know that yarn wasn't just made out of the Finn's fairy tale about his crazy treasure? Somebody may have heard it and got the notion that it was furs he meant, and that only he knew where to find 'em."

"Forget it! The Finn's no fool, if he is crazy. He wouldn't come up here after a pipe dream. That stuff he's pulling is only to choke me off the real scent; but he won't do it. If snow keeps us aboard in the morning, just watch him. You've got some interest now. Just stay awake in the daytime, and you'll see. Watch that parson, too. I ain't so sure about him."

"He ain't got sense enough to be dangerous," grumbled Mr. Coles, hauling himself to his feet and yawning. "My idea is, you better watch that pert wench in there!"

Pointing a fat, wavering finger at Peggy's door, the mate waddled off to bed, comfortably full of grog, with no sea watches to interrupt a long and restful sleep.

Muras sat for some moments, to finish his grog, and to seek in the red heart of the fire some answer to his doubts; but the red fire only reminded him of the red face of Mr. Coles. After a while he got up with a short laugh, stretched his arms, and smiled, as if his problem had solved itself.

He glanced toward the door of Peg's cabin, and drew himself erect briskly. He was a little unsteady, for his grog had been taken hot, and in full tumblers; but he smiled sunnily, and felt pleasantly prompted to enjoy a little feminine society.

Starting toward Peg's door, he halted. From his own stateroom he took a coat, a fur cap, and mittens, and paid a hurried visit on deck. He found the watchman asleep in the galley; but he had expected that. He merely shook the man up, and ordered him not to call an officer unless a rising wind made the bark's position beside the ice one of peril.

Then the skipper went below again, carefully shutting the outer doors against unheard intrusion, and flung off his wraps. His feet had been chilled by the brief trip outside, and he warmed them before going over to knock on Peg's door.

"Who's that?" cried the girl wakefully. "That you, Lute?"

"Not Lute, my pigeon, but your own big Ben," laughed Muras, rattling the door handle. "Come out! I got something to tell you."

"Tell me here!"

"I'll tell you out here. Come—open the door! You'll hate yourself if you miss it."

"Wait till I dress, then," said Peggy.

"Don't bother—just clap on a big coat. Come on, girl—I'm waiting!"

Muras was getting impatient. Peggy unlocked the door, and he gripped her hand as soon as she could be seen. He led her before the fire, and left her there while he got some more grog from his own locker. She had hung back defensively while he drew her along, until past his door, but after that she did not resist.

When Muras returned with his bottle, she was sitting in the chair lately vacated by Mr. Coles. The captain poured her some rum, mixed it with hot water from the kettle on the fire guard, and smiled down upon her while she drank. Then he took her glass.

"I want to have a little chat, Peggy," he said. "Get up and sit on my lap. This is special!"

He seized her around the waist, and drew her, struggling, out of her chair. The girl fought him. She did everything but cry out; and her teeth gleamed in the firelight. Muras seemed to enjoy the battle, for she could not twist herself free. He sat down in his own chair, and inexorably drew her to

him. In the scuffle, her long coat was torn open, and all but off her shoulders, leaving her scantily clad figure all warm and palpitant to his hot gaze.

With one arm clamped around her, and both her hands gripped in one of his, he poured himself a drink with his other hand, and toasted her jocularly.

"Here's to us—you and me, Peggy! To hell with the parson, hey, little pigeon? This is our night of nights, hey?"

He swallowed the last of his rum too eagerly, and almost choked, for Peg was silently setting all the strength of her young body against his grasp. Soon he added his other arm, and his eyes began to glitter.

"Let me go, you big mule!" she gritted.

Her eyes flashed toward Lute's pantry. The skipper's grasp tightened, and her ribs felt as if about to crack. He leaned over her, crushed his lips to hers, and scorched her with a savage kiss.

"Don't you holler for that cripple, unless you want to see him flung to the fish!" he warned her.

Peg struggled on in fierce silence. Presently his grip grew so terrific that she had to quit fighting or faint from sheer pain. Then, believing that his conquest was made, he grinned less fiercely.

"See, sweetness? No use fighting Ben Muras! But I know you only wanted to make me fight for my dues. I didn't want to hurt you. What d'ye say, Peggy? Come on over to my stateroom. Too many doors around here, and you don't want to see poor Lute hove to the fish. What say?"

"I'll say you got your nerve!" cried Peggy. "You better take more water with your rum. I'm going back to bed, if that's all you got to say to me!"

Muras swiftly clapped a hand to his breast. The recently healed knife wound throbbed from his struggle with the girl. The cold had bothered it, too, that day; but he held her in a firm grip, and still smiled.

"Come along, girl! What are you afraid of? You're standing in with me, ain't you? To-morrow you'll see then silver fox furs I told you about. You'll look bad all dressed in silver fox, smothered with diamonds, setting at the opory, hey? Let's talk it over!"

Peggy was staring right into his eyes. She wore a queer little smile of derision which aroused a slumbering devil within him.

"There's nothing to talk over," she returned. "You got a fat chance o' givin' me furs, or anything else! Haven't I heard

Toivo say more'n once there ain't any furs? You're chasin' windmills!"

Peggy laughed, not loudly, but not entirely silently, either, and tried to snatch away her hand. What she had just said was like a harsh finger applied to a raw wound, after his own doubts and the expressed suspicions of Mr. Coles. Muras let go her hand with an oath; but if she thought he meant to let her go, she was speedily put right.

"If I chase windmills, I'll get 'em," he said curtly. Then, with a hand outflung: "No more chat. Go to my cabin!"

"Go chase yerself!" she replied. "What d'you think I am?"

"I think you have a damned poor memory! D'ye want me to put your name in the log for murder?"

The girl's eyed clouded. The memory he brought back was not a nice one. Muras saw that she wavered.

"Go to my cabin!" he repeated. "I order you to go!"

"You go to the devil!" Peggy responded desperately. "Put me in the log—I'll take that chance!"

"If you don't go in two seconds, you cheating little devil, I'll call the mate and Chips and have you clapped in irons! Then I'll have 'em carry you to my cabin, and there you'll stay! You going?"

Peg darted to a porthole looking out upon the bleak main deck, where only a gleam from the galley told of human life. With her hand upon the fastening screw of the glass, she faced around and showed Muras how much determination could be displayed by one small person.

"You swine!" she cried. "Try it! Coles might obey you, for I turned him down, too. Chips might obey, for I called him an old goat, instead of a swine; but that's all! Don't dare come near me! If you put one finger on me again, I'll give a yell that'll turn this ship into a slaughter house! I tell you now, if I open this port and cry out, every sailor aboard your ship is ready to tumble out and come runnin', and it won't be two minutes before you'll be ready to go into the log yourself, dead! Come on—try it! Iron me and keep me in your room, hey? I bet you'll have something to show Soler when you meet him in hell!"

The pantry door was cautiously opened, and Lute's startled face peered out at the noise, for Peggy let her voice have full range.

"Go back, Lute!" she cried, laughing harshly. "Go back and lock your door, old boy. I'm all right, but the cap'n might slip a knife into you while you're asleep. He's a hot lover, till he's balked. He's likely to be a bad man, till he's faced. Look at him!"

Lute drew back; and Muras, scowling blackly, but not daring to challenge her threat, slowly retreated into his room.

Shortly after Peggy had flung her defiance at him, the skipper was sleeping. He could be heard throughout the saloon, even through closed doors. The fatigue of a long day's ice travel, and the stupor of staling liquor, made it easy for him to sleep, though he had felt more like murder a few moments earlier.

When his lusty, whistling snoring vibrated like the reed of a saxophone, the pantry door was opened, and Lute peeped out cautiously. Only one eye served Lute, and that imperfectly; but that partly opened eye gleamed among the crisscrossed plaster on his battered face with a light of purpose. Not with stealth, but with discreet care, he stepped along to Peggy's door and tapped. There was no response.

"It's Lute, Peggy!" he whispered at the transom over the door, hauling himself up by crooked fingers.

"What do you want?" she retorted.

"I want to see you. Got to talk to you. Come to the door, if you won't open it, Peggy!"

"Go to bed and leave me alone! I've had enough of men for one day."

"Listen, Peggy! I heard everything. Muras is bad. He'll—"

(To be concluded in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

"Oh, go to bed, Lute, and quit worrying over me!" Peggy interrupted sharply. "I ain't afraid of Muras; but if he wakes up and finds you there, your funeral's all set for to-morrow."

"I don't care!" Lute breathed desperately. "I can't leave you to that bully! You killed Soler to protect me, and—"

"Lute!" Peggy was desperate, too. "Lute, if you want to help me, go away, for the love of God! If you wake Muras up now, he'll blow a hole through you, and then what do you think I'll do? Go to bed, boy, and we'll chat in the morning, after the sled's gone out again. Do go, Lute!"

Peggy's hint that she depended upon him warmed the lad, and he was willing to obey her. He felt the thrill of responsibility. She had said, though not in so many words, that if Muras killed him she would be left without a defender. Lute had not felt quite so important since the day when the minister's niece had asked to be permitted to share his hymnbook in choir.

"All right!" he whispered back. "I'll do whatever you want, Peggy—anything; but you sing out quick if anybody bothers you again. I ain't so far away, and I shan't shut my door. D'ye hear?"

He leaned against the door, his head to the wood, to catch her reply.

Suddenly she opened the door, pushed him back as he almost fell in, and planted a lightning kiss upon his astonished eye. With equal rapidity the door closed again, and he heard the bolt go into the socket.

"I won't forget, Lute. You're a good kid!" she laughed shakily through the wood. "Good night!"

WILD CHERRY BLOOM

TENUOUS scarf of the spring,
Filmy white cloud in the green,
Pale as the breast of a dove,
Fair are the greetings you fling
Where, like a lover, you lean
Down from the hill slope above!

Narrow the span of your hour,
Little the girth of your store,
Meager your measure of worth;
Yet you give all of your dower—
Who, be it asked, could do more?—
Unto the beauty of earth!

Clinton Scollard

The House With One Wall

HOW OLD SUNG LI PROVED ONCE MORE THAT THE WAYS OF
A CHINAMAN ARE DARK

By Frederick Tisdale

THE Chinese are known to be a circuitous and sinister race. If you doubt it, you have only to consult any novel or motion picture that deals with them. You will learn that the average Chinaman inhabits a subterranean palace. The splendors of his underground apartment would awe a pagan emperor. From these headquarters he conducts a wholesale business in drug running, plain thievery, and fancy slaughter. When he becomes irked by the monotony of such pursuits, he regales his spirits with such pastimes as opium smoking and the kidnaping of pretty American girls for the slave trade.

True, I can take you to windows through which you may observe these Asiatics working furiously over ironing boards long after midnight; but the knowing are not misled by such sly deceptions. The toilers doubtless assume this appearance of innocent industry to mask the fiendish nature of their other enterprises.

In all San Francisco you could not have picked out a less likely vehicle for adventure than the laundry wagon of Sung Li. Its four wheels leaned out of line in as many independent directions. Successions of blazing California suns had cracked and faded its weary old canvas covering. It creaked and complained in all its joints at every yard it traveled. The old mare between its shafts was in perfect harmony with the rattletrap vehicle.

Their progress down Leavenworth Street became so gradual that Sung Li roused himself and gave the old mare's shaggy flank a slap with the worn rein.

"Forward, venerable grandmother," he urged.

The old mare rattled her bits. It may have been a polite acknowledgment of the salutation, but she did not alter the deliberation of her gait.

When she came to a complete stop, half a block short of her destination, Sung Li did not oppose her. Instead, he took two fat bundles from the back of his wagon, and, with one under each arm, crossed to the service entrance of an apartment house that clung precariously to a buttress of Russian Hill.

An Irish maid let Sung Li and his bundles into the tiny kitchen of an upper apartment.

"Hello, Chink!" the girl said.

"Hullo!" answered Sung Li cheerfully.

He dropped the heavy bundles on the figured linoleum, and stood in the middle of the room, with his cap in his hand. The shining kitchenware and the maid's immaculate black and white made the stooped old Chinaman look strangely out of place. His trousers and his green overcoat were in the last stages of threadbare exhaustion. The cap held in his hand had lost most of its dyes and all of its form. Sung Li's face had the texture and color of very old leather. There was about him an ageless air peculiar to his race. He might have been forty years old, or four hundred.

"Well?" demanded the Irish girl, as he continued to stand, grinning, in the middle of her kitchen.

"Money," said Sung Li.

The Irish maid lifted her voice.

"Miss Irene!" she called. "'Tis the Chink with the laundry. It's his money he's after."

Having passed along this information, she made her exit toward the front of the apartment. The Irish maid had never got used to these Chinks. When she was very young, some one had told her that Chinks ate rats, and she had never wholly recovered from the horror which the statement engendered.

When Irene Prescott entered the room,

Sung Li glowed as if an incandescent light had suddenly been turned on within him.

"Hello, Sung Li!" she said in that rich deep voice of hers.

"Miss Irene!" answered the old Chinaman respectfully.

She had brought a bag with her. As she explored its depths for money, she indulged in her usual banter with Sung Li. Irene Prescott was in the full bloom of the middle thirties. Tall and deep-breasted, she radiated an impression of sunshine and fresh air.

"How much is it this time?" she demanded in a tone of resignation.

"Four dolla', eighty-five."

"What?" She pretended to be incensed at his charge. "Why, you're an old pirate, Sung Li! That's outrageous! I can remember when you would have worked a month for that much money. You must be a millionaire by this time. How is business, anyhow?"

"Very bad, very bad. I am very poor man."

"Oh, you always say that!"

She had taken a five-dollar bill from the bag. Before handing it to the laundryman, she looked down at the stooped old figure with one of those rare gusts of compassion that strength has for infirmity.

"We are older, Sung Li. We have known each other for a long time."

"Long time, long time," the old Chinaman assented eagerly. "I cook for your mother. You 'bout this high. Very little girl. You play round all time in my kitchen. I have to look always, or maybe I step on you. I come San Francisco when you leave Modesto."

An old fear leaped suddenly into Irene Prescott's dark eyes, and made him stop.

"Sung Li," she said, "never speak of Modesto!"

"No speak Modesto?"

"Never!"

He nodded and was silent.

"That is past, Sung Li. I have never told my husband. We are happy—very happy."

"You very happy? I am glad," said Sung Li.

Her bantering tones returned as she handed him the five-dollar bill.

"Keep the fifteen cents, Sung Li. Buy yourself a new horse and wagon with it."

"Thank you, Miss Irene."

As Sung Li closed the door and went

down the back stairs, he murmured in his own tongue:

"What are the words of the ancient elder-born? 'The mind of man may fathom all mysteries, save only those that are hidden in the inner soul of woman.'"

II

In the street Sung Li found that his old mare had edged toward the curb and was hungrily cropping at the coarse grass that bordered it. The laundryman gathered up his reins, but he let them fall again.

"Continue a little while, venerable grandmother," he said aloud. "Fresh, green grass is good for your ancient belly. You shall pad your ribs with it somewhat, since the gods do not permit that I should upholster you with oats."

As the mare's worn teeth clipped off the crisp blades, Sung Li gazed out at the tremendous panorama before him. Below him the multicolored roofs of San Francisco dozed in the aching brilliance of the cold Pacific sunlight. Beyond, the bold hump of Telegraph Hill, with its waving crest of trees, cut through the blue magnificence of the bay. The brittle clarity of the air preserved every detail of the landscape, every fold of the distant topaz hills.

Sung Li's view was unobstructed. The lots where his wagon stood had not been rebuilt since the great fire. Weathered ruins of foundations could still be seen. Below, the slope of Russian Hill fell away.

A fleecy tongue of fog, racing in through the Golden Gate, struck and enveloped the tall finger of the Alcatraz Light. It reminded Sung Li that it was getting late.

"Come, venerable one!" He pulled the old mare's reluctant lips from the grass. "Your stomach is bottomless. The filling of it would require all night."

Crazily and with much clatter the wagon descended the steep cobbles toward Chinatown.

Sung Li's laundry occupied the basement below the Pawn Shop of Great Mercy—which, as many an unfortunate knows, is in Jackson Street. Only two small bundles descended the narrow iron steps with the proprietor—a fact that hinted at the low estate of his business.

His three Cantonese assistants did not look up from their ironing boards as Sung Li came in. A fat little stove occupied the middle of the room, and six irons rested their smooth faces about the dull red of

its equator. One of the Cantonese crossed and plucked an iron from its place.

"Honorable one," said he, "there is not enough fire. See—this iron is not hot enough to sear the tongue."

Sung Li opened the mouth of the stove and bent over the coal bucket. He counted the lumps as he threw them in.

"One, two, three." He picked out a fourth lump, but did not throw it in. "Did not the man of Italy come with the two bags of coal which I ordered?" he asked, looking up.

"The man of Italy came," answered the Cantonese, "but he left at once. Also he took the coal with him, because there was no payment. In parting he spoke many vile words which we did not fully comprehend."

"But I left the money with my foster son!"

"Sung Wu did not part with it. Sung Wu is—there."

The Cantonese pointed with lifted chin, after the manner of his countrymen.

Carefully Sung Li replaced the fourth lump of coal in the bucket and closed the stove. He followed the direction indicated by the lifted chin, and entered a door at the back of the laundry. A single drop bulb illuminated the room in which he lived. Its rays struck high lights from a small gilt shrine in one corner. A cheap porcelain god of wealth was enthroned here. Above him were tablets bearing the characters of Sung Li's ancestral name. Red banners with mottoes from the classics hung from the walls.

In the center of the room stood a small ebony table, with much of its carving and inlay gone. There was a narrow bunk on either side, and across one of the bunks sprawled Sung Wu. The young Chinese was as sleek and fat as a silk grub. Utter and infinite peace was upon his pasty face.

"The money that I left for coal," mused Sung Li, "has gone the way of many pilgrims. With the tar of the poppy my son wipes out realities and lives in fortunate dreams!"

Beside the bunk lay Sung Wu's cap. A small triangle of yellow parchment peeped from the inner band. Sung Li slipped out the paper and opened it. There was a small dab of sticky black-brown gum inside. It gave off an odor that was sickly sweet. Opium! From his thievings the dreamer had been able to provide an extra smoking.

It has been said that misfortunes travel in multitudes. Verily Sung Li's troubles were swarming upon him like geese upon a rice field. He held the pellet of opium between his fingers and looked helplessly about the room. From its shrine the sardonic god of wealth leered at him.

With sudden determination Sung Li crossed and faced the porcelain image. From a drawer below the shrine he took two yellow candles, one of which he set beside the deity. Then he spitted the pellet of opium upon a sliver of bamboo. Thrusting the tar into the flame of the second candle, he held it just below the flat nose of the god of wealth.

"Illustrious one!" whispered Sung Li. "Giver of abundance, accept this offering!"

Faintly the precious tar bubbled on its spit. Minute blisters formed and broke. A thin blue thread spiraled upward, and the room was filled with an acrid odor. By deft turns of the bamboo Sung Li kept the drippings to the flame. At last the pellet was consumed.

Sung Li set the second candle beside the little porcelain god. Fixing his eyes upon the sooted face of the divinity, he knelt before it and began to speak softly.

"Oh, illustrious one, hear thy faithful servant! I am not one of those who serve thee only on the first day of the first moon. Each night I make proper obeisance before thee; yet small gain has come of it. It is written on the tablets of jade that whatsoever men prize most, that is most acceptable to the gods. Surely the magic incense of the poppy, which I have burned before thy honorable face, is acceptable to thee; for what do men seek more than the black gum which imprisons the fortunate dreams? Hear now the unworthy prayer of Sung Li, and grant that it be of good omen.

"Poverty and loss of face are upon thy servant. Yonder children of the turtles at my ironing boards destroy the linen of the Americans. That which they do not de-face, they steal. Small profits have come into my shop, and these have been stolen by my foster son and burned to buy dreams. Ruin is upon me. If help does not come from thee, within a day I shall be a pauper. Aid thy servant, illustrious one! I would accept the intervention of devils to escape the gulf that threatens!"

After a pause, he drew closer to the blackened image and whispered cunningly:

"It is not for myself that I care. I am an old man, and my wants are few; but it would crush my heart to sell thee to Yomomato. I groan to think of thee held up by the hands of the monkey man, hawked like a jar of ginger to the look-see people of Grant Avenue."

Sung Li rose on his creaking knees. He was rather proud of that parting threat. Surely that would prick the divinity to a speedy rescue; for what greater shame could fall upon the porcelain god than to be haggled over and sold at the hands of a Japanese?

III

SUNG LI blew out the candles. Past the sprawled fatness of his adopted son he went back into the front room, and sat down at his tiny desk. He felt vastly encouraged—prepared for a miracle. Reaching for his abacus, his flying fingers again cast up his accounts. The miracle was not there. The inexorable little balls only confirmed the doom they had pronounced a hundred times before.

From where he sat Sung Li could see the feet that clicked or shuffled past on the sidewalk above his door. Absently he watched this endless parade of seemingly disembodied shoes.

At last one pair halted. They were large and stained and shabby. They turned, and came down the narrow iron stairs toward Sung Li.

The visitor was a big man. It seemed to Sung Li that the inverted process of his appearance would never be finished. Frayed trouser legs appeared after the shoes, and above the trousers a dingy blue jersey. The head had to stoop to get inside the door. Sung Li started when he saw it.

"Has the giver of abundance taken me at my word and sent a demon?" he asked himself.

The giant's eyes were a dirty blue; his hair was a brick red. Every one knows that the hair of devils is crimson, and that their eyes are blue.

Shuffling straight to the old Chinaman's desk, the visitor thrust forward his unrazored jowls.

"I want to see you for a minute, Chinky," he announced.

"You see me," said Sung Li.

"No funny cracks! Alone, I mean."

"Come, then."

Sung Li led the way to the little room at

the back of the laundry, where Sung Wu still lay in yellow oblivion upon his bunk. The giant jerked a soiled thumb toward the motionless figure.

"Alone, I said!"

"It is all the same," Sung Li assured him. "That is my foster son. He sleeps very good."

The visitor sniffed.

"I got you," he said. "Been hitting the pipe. Now we'll get down to business." He seated himself on the bunk beside the dreamer, and leaned across the carved table toward Sung Li. "You don't savvy who I am, do you?"

"Yes—I know you, all right. You Bill Kilgore. I no see you fourteen, fifteen—how many year?"

"I been gone eighteen years. Left just before the big fire. Got dead drunk on the water front, and when I come to I'm on a Belgian windjammer headed for Hong-kong. Been bumming up and down the China coast ever since."

"We all think you get killed in the fire. Your wife think so—everybody."

"Yeh?" Kilgore lit a cigarette. "Well, I didn't get killed, and here I am. I hunted you up to find out about my wife. Where is Irene?"

"I don't know," said Sung Li.

Kilgore caught one of the old Chinaman's wrists in a huge paw, and twisted as he spoke.

"Listen to me, Chink! I landed here yesterday. After walking over half the Mission, I found old Lucy Krass. Her head's weak, and she was so drunk she couldn't tell me where to find Irene; but she did say my wife had married again—married some guy that works in a bank. She told me to hunt you up. She said you could wise me on where to find Irene, and who this guy is that she's married."

"Why do you think I know?" replied Sung Li, whose voice was steady in spite of the twisted arm.

"Listen again, Chink! I been in China quite some years. It's no use for you to try and pull any of this Asiatic trick stuff on me. I know you was nuts about Irene from the time she was a kid—long before we run away to get married. You did all you could to keep her from skipping out with the red-headed ranch hand that had captured her girlish fancy. No lies, now! Irene is in San Francisco, and you're in San Francisco, so you know where she is,

and you're going to tell me. If you don't, I'll break this arm off and slap you in the face with it. I ain't kiddin' you."

Beads were standing on Sung Li's wrinkled forehead, but his voice was still unshaken as he asked:

"Why you want her?"

"Why? Can't you see, you damned old fool, that it means money in my hands? I been through forty kinds of hell since I left here. I've slept with the dogs on the Saigon wharves. I've fought buzzards for garbage on the beaches of China. Somebody's got to pay for that, ain't they? Well, she's still my wife. If she's gone and married a guy that works in a bank, there's where the money 'll come from. She'll pay to keep him from knowing. You might as well tell. If you don't, I can find out somewhere else." He gave the wrist a jerk. The tortured old bones cracked faintly. "Where is Irene? Tell me, and there may be some money in it for you!"

Sung Li shook his head.

A third voice cut into the silence:

"Irene? I know the woman. I can tell you where to find her."

In his astonishment, Kilgore released Sung Li's wrist, and turned. It was Sung Wu who had spoken. The loud voices had roused him somewhat from the effect of the drug, and he sat regarding the others with half opened eyes. Before Kilgore could recover from his surprise, Sung Li spoke in staccato Chinese:

"Attend, my son! This affair is mine. Many indignities have I suffered at your hands; but if you so far forget the filial proprieties as to interfere in this, you shall surely ride upon the dragon. Tell this American what he seeks, and to-night I strangle you!"

Though the opium still clouded his brain, Sung Wu was cowed by the threat. He did not answer when Kilgore demanded:

"Where is she, then, if you know?"

"I have told my son to keep out of this," Sung Li put in, as he chafed the circulation back into his wrist. "This business is for us two."

At a sign from his elder, Sung Wu picked his cap from the floor and dragged his fat person from the room. When the door had closed on the young man's back, Sung Li stood up.

"You make much talk," said he; "now you listen, Bill Kilgore. I know where this woman is. I always know where she is,

since she play on my kitchen floor as a small girl; but she gives me no thought. Old Sung Li is nothing to her. Now, I too have much need of money. If there is gold to be got from her, enough can be had for both of us."

"Now you're talking sense!" cried Kilgore, smiting the ebony table with a heavy fist.

"Hear me, then. There is much love between your wife and her new husband. She can get money from him. If he has not as much as we ask, she will weep and plead, and he will find it for her. There is plenty in the big steel box at the bank. From now on you and I are partners in this. You get half, I get half." With raised hand Sung Li stopped a movement of protest. "Listen once again," he went on. "I am older than you, and maybe I can handle this business better than you. Alone you butt into it with your eyes shut. In a week you would be behind bars in the gray stone house on Kearny Street. You get no money, I get no money."

Kilgore disturbed his matted mop of red hair with a broad finger.

"There's something to that," he admitted. "Blackmail is out of my line. You Chinks are slicker than God's white men. I agree—fifty-fifty. Shake on it, Sung Li!"

Reluctantly Sung Li extended a hand that still ached.

"To-night I take back Miss Irene's clean wash," he said. "You go in the wagon, too. You come out of the dark all of a sudden. She will have much fear. Whatever we demand she will agree to."

"At least a thousand for the first shot," said Kilgore, and stroked his grinning lips.

"*Ai-yah*, you are too cheap! First we get five thousand. As we go along we ask more."

Kilgore voiced his admiration of the Chinaman's larger tactics. Then he thrust forward a red palm and assumed a wheedling tone.

"We're partners now, Sung Li. We ought to have a bottle here to seal the bargain. Eh? Just a couple of little drinks. My throat's so dry there are cracks in it."

"There is nothing here," said Sung Li. "I do not drink; but wait." He took a piece of paper and scribbled on it with a stubby pencil. "Take this to the Portuguese who runs the food store one block down on Stockton Street. He will give you a bottle. There will be no charge. He will

take it out of what he owes me for my work. Return here at half past nine to-night, and together we go for the money."

IV

KILGORE hulked out of the room. When he had left, Sung Li drew his feet upon the bunk and faced the corner where the sardonic eyes of the little god of wealth watched him from beneath the opium soot. An hour later one of the Cantonese came in to ask his master when he would take rice, but he was waved away without an answering word.

Tumult was within Sung Li. The two voices of his soul fought and wrangled with each other. They seemed so loud and distinct that he wondered whether the Cantonese outside could hear them.

"The giver of abundance has heard your prayer," said one voice. "You have but to put forth a hand. Much gold can be had of this woman. Your miseries have found their end!"

"Yet it is an evil thing to do," protested the other voice. "This woman is my little friend of happier days."

"Poverty is the maker of its own decrees. You are an old man. Few chances of good fortune and little life are left to you."

"Yet in the end is peace; and I have a son."

"A son—but what a son! You adopted him after the ancient custom, that he might perform the fitting devotions which insure the eternal tranquillity of the soul; but he has accepted the heathenish customs of this impious land. He scoffs at the old rituals. No fat fowls will he place upon your grave; no ghost money will he send to you on the wings of flame. The chiefest of ten thousand curses will be upon you—that of an unfilial son. Your spirit will wander whimpering through the gray skies. The demons themselves will shun you. Take then the gold, before it is too late!"

"It is an evil thing to do."

"The gold will buy balm for all your wounds. You can return to your ancestral village, to the sleeping dust of your fathers. Do you remember the village of the Blue Lotus, and how its white walls look at themselves in the quiet waters of the Great Canal? There is still strength in your loins. With this gold you can take unto your couch a virgin like warm amber. She will drive the cold from your bed on

winter nights. She will be fruitful with sons. In life they will honor your gray hairs. When the dragon requires your soul of the body, they will mourn the allotted three years and make the sacrifices that are needful."

"Yet would I despise myself. She is as near to my heart as if she had been a child of my own flesh!"

"And how does she regard you? She jokes with you, but she is the true daughter of a barbarous and selfish people. She would not raise an eyelash to save you from the tortures of the nether world. The evil that has come upon her is born of her own headstrong folly. After all, she is but a woman."

"I would save her, for all that."

"How can you save her? This demon with the red hair has the strength of ten buffaloes. If you do not disclose the whereabouts of this woman, others will do it, as he said. Your son, when the madness for the black gum comes upon him, will seek the man out and whisper it."

"All this is true, and yet—"

Sung Li had been gazing with unseeing eyes at one of the bannered mottoes upon his wall. It was just to the left, above the little shrine. Gradually his eyes focused, and the characters of the long-dead sage spoke to him. They said:

Other things than wealth are necessary to the superior man. Who would live in a house that hath one wall?

Sung Li was still gazing at this motto when Kilgore returned. The red giant shouldered in without knocking. An evil rancidity entered with him, advertising to the nose the quality of the poison he had absorbed. His livid face made him look more like a demon than ever to the eyes of the Chinese.

"Well, partner!" Kilgore cried, giving Sung Li's narrow back a heavy slap. "Time to go for the jack! It's a foggy, dirty night outside. Dirty weather for dirty work, eh?"

He laughed at his own cleverness. Sung Li rose from his bunk.

"All right," he said cheerfully. "Come 'long!"

They went into the laundry room, where the three Cantonese sat about the cold stove and smoked stolidly. Sung Li paused to pick up a bundle, and then followed Kilgore's wide shoulders up the iron steps.

The city was muffled in a thick fog that rolled in from the tule marshes. Street lamps made feeble yellow auras in the cold mist. The world was full of noises that came from unseen sources—the roar of street cars, the shrieks of motor horns, the steady patter of feet. Tiny beads of moisture glistened on the turned up coats of the shadowy Chinamen who shuffled past.

"God, it's cold!" shivered Kilgore. "We better get a taxi."

"There is no money—yet," Sung Li answered. "That is my wagon there. We go in it."

While Sung Li stowed the packages in the back, Kilgore surveyed the ancient vehicle with affected concern. He shook a wheel speculatively. When it did not collapse, he climbed into the seat with exaggerated care.

Sung Li followed. He gathered up the reins and pulled the old mare's reluctant head from the soap box that she was exploring in a search for stray oat grains.

"Well," said Kilgore, "we ain't starting out in much style; but when we put on the screws, we'll be riding in Rolls-Royces. I ain't kiddin' you!"

Sung Li made no responses as the old wagon clattered off into the fog.

Alcohol and expectations had loosened Kilgore's tongue. He regaled the silent Sung Li with reminiscences of the old days, when he and Irene were together on the Modesto ranch. She was crazy about him, all right. After they married, he used to rough her up a little, but hell, women didn't mind that. Wonder what she'd say when she saw him! It would floor her, probably. Serve her damned well right, too! Her living in luxury all these years, and him, her first husband, with nothing to eat half the time! This new one works in a bank, too. That was duck soup for the pardners, eh, Sung Li?

"Yes," Sung Li responded briefly, and kept his eyes on the old mare's bobbing ears.

They turned off into Lombard Street. Here the decrepit wagon creaked and rattled worse than ever, for its iron rims encountered cobblestones. The old mare wheezed as she labored up the grade.

"Be comforted, ancient elder-born," Sung Li said to her. "The returning will be less difficult."

Kilgore began to sing. It was something about the buccaneers having hairy ears—

which is as much of the ballad as shall appear in these pages. They continued the ascent. The murmur of the city became fainter; the sounds from the fog-blinded bay grew more distinct. A lumber schooner bellowed mournfully as she groped her way toward the Golden Gate. Shore sirens blended their warnings in a deep symphony that expressed all the melancholy of the sea.

Sung Li was turning a corner.

"It is in this street that she lives," he told his companion.

"Leavenworth, ain't it? I wonder if she'll be glad to see me! Well, it's going to be a happy occasion for me, anyhow."

A block and a half farther on Sung Li pulled up.

"Remember," he warned, "five thousand dollars! There is her house."

The fog about them was stained a luminous yellow by a murky street lamp. At first Kilgore could see nothing. Then he made out a flight of stone steps and a section of the wall. More the mists did not disclose.

"Leave it to me, kid!" said Kilgore.

Heavily his bulk slouched down from the wagon seat. He still weaved a little from the effects of the alcohol. Sung Li, silent and motionless in the shadowy wagon, watched the other as his feet sought the mounting stones.

"Five thousand," Kilgore muttered, as he took the first step. "Ten thousand"—that was the second. "Fifteen thousand—twenty thousand—twenty-five thousand;" and that was the top of the flight.

Sung Li could just see the ruffian's wide back as it swayed upon the last step. An arm reached forward.

"Where the hell is the doorbell?" Kilgore grumbled.

His wide back swayed again, his hand made an uncertain arc in the blackness. Then, magically, the figure disappeared. Sung Li heard a terrible bellow. It diminished rapidly, and ended with a muffled crash far below.

From the hill above came the querulous jangle of a Hyde Street cable car bell. Then there was silence.

Sung Li gathered up his reins and slapped the old mare's shaggy rump.

"Ai, venerable grandmother!" said he. "The thing is finished. One more ride will the big red-beard get; but you will never pull him again."

The next morning, as she finished her coffee, Irene Prescott glanced casually through the society gossip of the *Chronicle*. She turned the page without noticing a short filler that pieced out the foot of a column. It said:

The body of an unidentified man was found this morning at the foot of a hill near Lombard and Leavenworth Streets. He had apparently been

killed by a fall, the drop being some fifty feet at this point. Detective Sergeant Dennis McCafferty, who investigated the case, said there was evidence that the man had been drinking.

Just above this spot on Leavenworth Street are several flights of stone steps left from buildings destroyed by the fire. Sergeant McCafferty thinks that the man may have climbed a flight of these steps in the fog, believing that he was about to enter a building, and that he fell when he reached the top.

The Old Wreck

PANSY MAY'S FUNNY OLD MAN MAY NOT HAVE BEEN REAL,
BUT HE PROVED TO BE A REAL FRIEND

By George Sterling

THERE'S that funny man again!" said Pansy May, pointing down the white beach to the gray ribs of the old wreck.

Her father, shading his eyes with one hand, stared across the sun dazzle. Then he turned to the little girl, as if ashamed of his curiosity.

"Pansy May! Pansy May!" he cried. "I wonder what you'll do with that imagination of yours when you grow up!"

"But he *is* there!" protested the child. "See, he's sitting on that biggest stick, where he always sits, and keeps looking down at the sand. Papa, is he looking for silver shells? Does he want—"

"He isn't looking for shells, for he's not there to look," said Papa Kip impatiently. "Come, we'll settle this thing for once and all!"

He took Pansy May's small brown hand and began to stroll with her toward the old wreck.

For months the subject had been a disturbing one to the Kip family, ever since the day the child had announced, after her first visit alone to the beach, that an oddy attired man was seated on one of the ribs of the ship that had been stranded there so long ago that none knew its history. Papa Kip had gone at once to investigate, had found no one there, and had returned to

scold the little girl for a wasted half hour in a day that had few minutes to waste.

Pansy May had possessed her soul in patience, for she knew better. Couldn't one trust one's own eyes, small and dark though they were? But the thing had happened again, and again. Papa Kip had had his journey in vain. Now the matter should be disposed of once and for all. It seemed likely to be.

"See, Pansy May!" cried Papa Kip. "Where's your funny man now?"

Indeed, it would have needed sharper sight than mine or yours to see any one but father and daughter in the vicinity of the old wreck.

"He went away," gravely announced the child. "He went away as soon as we began to go visit him. He always goes away when I try to bring him visitors."

"But if he went away," said Papa Kip, "where are his footprints? See, there aren't any footprints in the sand, Pansy May—only yours and mine!"

The little girl looked puzzled, but only for a moment.

"I guess he makes a hole in the sand," she replied. "Maybe he has a cave."

"You see only a shadow, Pansy May—only a shadow."

"But he spoke to me," protested the child. "Last time he waited till I got al-

most here, and I said 'Hello!' and he said 'Hello!' and then he went away. Of course he has a cave. Shadows don't speak to people."

"You're a weird little thing," said Papa Kip. "I'm glad I've not your imagination. Seeing things! Your grandma used to be the same way. Lot of good it did her!"

"Look!" cried Pansy May, anxious, apparently, to change the course of the conversation. "Look! See all the little white sea gulls!"

The father laughed, less uneasily this time. Indeed, the myriads of tiny white-caps that began to flash on the broken turquoise of the bay might well be compared to a great flock of the lesser tern, jauntily riding the ruffled waters; but a base opportunity suggested itself.

"There you go again!" he exclaimed. "Seeing things! If they're sea gulls, they'll fly when I do this." Stooping, he selected a smooth, flat pebble and threw it far out. "See!" he said. "They didn't move. If they'd really been sea gulls, they'd have flown up in the air."

"Ah!" replied his adoring daughter. "They just *knew* you wouldn't hurt them!"

Papa Kip looked baffled.

"Come," he said. "We must go home. No time to waste like this!"

Hand in hand, they walked homeward across the broad salt meadow, the sea wind making mischief with Pansy May's dark hair.

The home to which they came was set on several acres of thin soil that rose like an island a few feet above the surface of the marsh, which reached for miles north and south. Eastward gleamed the dunes of the bay, and far to the west ran a line of dark trees. Beyond these lay the village, to which a primitive road reached uncertainly across the long green levels.

The house was old and frail, but the surrounding apple trees gave it dignity, and somehow made it seem larger than it actually was. There were the usual ramshackle outbuildings, and beyond these rose a great sycamore, in the top of which a pair of ospreys had built their nest, renewed with each succeeding spring.

Father and daughter walked in between two ranks of wind-tilted hollyhocks. Mamma Kip was at the walk's end, solicitous over some ailing petunias.

"Well!" she said, straightening up. "Had a nice walk, Ed?"

"Good enough," replied her husband. "Pansy May's been seeing things again."

The mother frowned. She, too, remembered her own mother, the woman credited with second sight and with other gifts that would a century before have assured her the reputation of a witch.

"I wish she'd stop that!" she murmured. Then, with a note of anxiety in her voice: "Old Jackson was here while you were away. He couldn't stay, though."

The man's face darkened.

"Just as well," he replied. "He may as well take over the place. Father couldn't make it go when the soil was untouched, so how can I?"

"No, Ed, it's not so bad as that. It's only the eternal interest, interest, interest. With that out of the way, and ducks, and the north end in cranberries—"

"Out of the way!" echoed the man. "I tell you 'twon't ever be out of the way. Folks die, but mortgages go on forever. It wasn't even my mortgage, at first."

"I know, I know," she replied sympathetically. "If only we could get to California, now!"

"Hot chance!"

"Ella and Joe are doing wonderfully there."

"They ought to try what we're up against. Any one can buy fruit ranches on a legacy."

He scowled, and strode off toward the gray barn. Evidently the subject was already exhausted.

The mother turned to the child, who had been petting some small growing thing.

"Come, Pansy May! There's dinner to get."

"Why can't we eat flowers, mamma? I could go out every day and get you loads and loads of flowers."

"What would we do in winter?"

"In winter? Couldn't we put milk and lots of sugar in snow, and eat that? I like it—lots!"

Mamma Kip looked thoughtful.

"It may be about all we'll get, come winter," she replied; but the little girl was already on her way to her kittens.

II

THE old wreck lay warm and wasting in the hot sunlight of the August forenoon. It had been there many years, and would stay many more, for the few ribs and the sternpost that remained had been hewn

from stout oak by hands that had pride in their task. Driven ashore out of the neighboring Atlantic in a great winter gale, long before Papa Kip's father had adventurously built his home on the island in the marsh, it had been wedged in the mouth of a shallow creek that drained the meadow at that point.

The storm had dammed the creek with sand, giving it a new outlet half a mile down the shore. When the wreck had finally been discovered, by boys hunting sandpipers' eggs in the early summer, a few ribs and the sternpost, deeply embedded, were all that remained. The very name of the ship was lacking, or any hint of her character or relic of her crew. Now the gull and shore bird alone visited the spot—these and Pansy May.

She was busied, even now, building with white pebbles and golden shells a jail, a prison house, a place of incarceration. Its walls rose higher and higher, but the prisoner, a small but tireless crab, seemed full of hope. Perhaps he realized at last that escape was a matter of strategy rather than of activity, for finally he crouched in a corner of his dungeon and surveyed his jailer's efforts with what he probably intended to be a scornful expression.

"Wait and see what time and high tide do to your castle," he might have been saying.

The little girl shared no such spacious foreboding. The future was well able to take care of itself; the present was the stage of architectural splendors. At last the artist in her drank of the rich cup of satisfaction.

"There!" she said sternly. "Now you're locked up, and locked up you'll stay—biting folks' toes when they go in wading! Ain't you ashamed?"

The prisoner seemed but imperfectly penitent. Perhaps he, too, regarded remorse as a medieval emotion; but he may have deemed retort by action, for suddenly, and without any apparent effort, he sank into the moist sand.

"Ho!" said Pansy May. "You have a cave, too! You go away just like my funny man!"

She glanced down the lonely beach. Sure enough, the shadowy figure was there, seated quietly on the worn gray sternpost. He was bent a little forward, and seemed to be gazing steadily at the white sands before him.

"He looks sorry," commented Pansy May. "I guess he won't mind if I ask him what's the matter."

She strode sturdily down the beach, just at the edge of the foam line, her eyes fixed on the stranger. Just as she was almost near enough to give him kindly salutation, he seemed to waver—to blur, as it were—and then he disappeared, going out like a blown candle flame.

"He didn't go in any cave *then*," said Pansy May.

She heard a call, and turned to see her mother coming toward her along the beach. She did not, however, run to greet Mamma Kip, but walked forward and gravely inspected the smooth sand about the gray sternpost.

"No," she said aloud. "There isn't any footprint."

Then she was aware that her mother was near.

"Oh, Pansy May!" cried Mamma Kip. "You mustn't! You mustn't!"

"Mustn't what?" asked the child.

"You mustn't come here any more, my darling!"

"Did you see that funny man?" asked Pansy May.

"I—" The mother seemed confused. "There isn't any man, dear! And if there were, you shouldn't go near him or speak to him. You mustn't come here any more, my darling!"

"I want to find shells," protested the child. "I can't play with kittens *all* the time. I want to watch the sea gulls, and go in wading, and hunt for little crabs, and see—"

"You can go to the north beach," said her mother. "It's a little farther, but it's just as nice."

"There aren't any gold shells there."

"Well, come, and we'll gather a whole apronful of them, and then you may scatter them on the other beach and pick them up again."

"Huh, secondhand! That won't be much fun."

"Better than no shells at all. Come, here are some already."

They turned their backs on the old wreck and strolled northward along the shore. They passed the white and gold edifice, and Pansy May explained its nature and deplored the uncommon malevolence of its unseen captive. Soon a wave more adventurous than the rest had washed far up the

beach and played havoc with the dungeon, and its prisoner was released on his own cognizance.

III

CAME a morning in late October that turned the bay to a harder turquoise and made the wave crests seem colder and whiter. Pansy May, from an upper window of her home, could see all that, though the low dunes hid the forbidden beach. Papa and Mamma Kip had driven to town early in the day. Both seemed even graver than usual, and once Mamma Kip had wept a little, very quietly.

"That old Jackson!" thought Pansy May. "I know!"

Dolls seemed somehow inadequate to such a portentous morning. Even the kittens had been robbed of much of their younger magic, and had grown larger and more sedate.

"You must think you're mighty important," she said to the black and white one, which seemed to scorn all reply. "I know you're not. Even your mother doesn't amount to a row of pins. My own father says so. There!"

The black and white kitten seemed unconvinced, and simulated sudden and insincere interest in a scarlet maple leaf.

"No importance whatever," Pansy May asserted. "Nor your mother nor your father."

The child had never been to school, but her parents had seen that her education had been at least as good as that of any girl of her years. Perhaps the mother of the kittens had been as solicitous with her own offspring, making them wiser creatures but poorer playmates. Pansy May felt her first access of boredom.

"I wonder if that funny man's sitting there all this time," she thought.

With Pansy May, to wonder was often to investigate.

"I guess it's all right just to go and have a peek," she announced to the lethargic mother cat, kittens being beneath apology or even explanation.

The beach stretched chill and desolate. The tide was at the full, with swift, slapping waves; but the funny man was at his accustomed station.

"I should think he'd get lonesome, sitting there," thought Pansy May, and drew nearer.

The object of her sympathy seemed quiet and gentle enough—a crab was a tiger by comparison.

"Don't you ever get lonesome?" asked Pansy May.

A little shiver seemed to go over the man. Then he turned his face toward the child and spoke.

"I am often lonesome," he answered.

Pansy May had never talked over a telephone, but had she done so she might now have thought:

"Why, he sounds so far away, like some one on the phone!"

As it was, she gave no attention to the matter, but politely said:

"I should think you'd enjoy talking to a little girl now and then. I like to talk to you."

"I do like to talk to you," replied the man.

His hat, now that she came to regard it more closely, seemed to blur at the edges, to lack definite outline. Moreover, it was of an odd shape, and a narrow band of faded red ran around its lower portion. Papa Kip never wore red on his hat.

"Well," said Pansy May, "to start the ball a rolling, I'd like to ask you some questions."

"Of course," he replied.

"Well, to begin with, why do you wear that funny hat?"

"Funny! Funny! Is my hat funny?" He seemed somewhat shocked, and spoke in a pained voice. "What makes you think my hat's funny? The captain I had it from—"

He checked himself.

"It seems funny to me, but I dare say it's all right where you came from. Where did you come from—I mean *come*?"

The man flung out an arm toward the sea, and stared mournfully southeastward.

"As I sailed, as I sailed," he muttered, and again: "As I sailed!"

"What's that?" asked Pansy May.

"Just an old song."

"Will you teach it to me? I sing. I sing to my kittens."

"You'd not like this song."

"I like 'Beulahland,' lots!"

"This isn't a bit like the songs you know."

He turned his gaze once more on the little girl, and smiled. His eyes, now that she saw them at close range, were peculiar, to say the least, for they seemed unformed

or incomplete, like mere smudges of black in his white face, growing alternately larger and smaller. Pansy May inspected them with considerable interest.

"Why don't you make footprints?" she asked.

The man seemed taken by surprise.

"Don't I make footprints?"

"No—you never do. I suppose it's your funny shoes."

"So my shoes are funny, too?"

"Oh, yes, and your coat and your pants and your eyes! I think you're all funny, but I like it. I should think you'd love to make footprints, just where the waves can wash them out."

"I've not done that since I was a small boy, in Devon—in Devon across the blue water."

"Have you a cave?"

"Cave?" He looked puzzled. "What would I want a cave for?"

"Well, you keep going away. You go away and don't speak to my dear mamma and papa. Shall I tell them you're sorry?"

"But I'm not sorry, and I don't go away. I sit here always and always."

"No wonder you're lonesome! But of course you go back to the city in the winter."

The man shook his head, and it seemed to blur to an almost shapeless mass. Then everything was as it had been before.

"But don't you get cold?" cried Pansy May.

"No cold, no heat, for me—just wonder, wonder."

"It gets awful cold here in winter. My mamma wants to go to California in the winter."

"No! Don't go away! This is a better place for you than—did you say California? I've never heard of it."

"Why, how funny! It's in the geography. My mamma teaches me geography. I hate it!"

"You mustn't hate anything, or anybody. You're just a little girl."

"I hate old Mr. Jackson! He's going to make us go away from here some day. I know. I hear mamma and papa talking about it."

"Go away!" The man seemed startled and perturbed. "You mustn't go away, little girl. You must stay here and let me watch you at your play. Who is this Mr. Jackson?"

"He's an old man. He has tobacco in

his beard, and papa owes him a lot of money."

"Money! So that's it!" cried the old man. "Always money! You mustn't have too little, and you mustn't have too much. Always money!"

He gazed dreamily at the sky, which the October clouds were now setting to a blue maze.

"Money's nice," asserted Pansy May. "My mamma cried when she lost a dollar."

"Look there, little girl!" suddenly cried the man, and pointed to a spot a few feet before him.

Pansy May turned and looked. There was something yellow in the sand. At first she thought it was a golden shell, but this was larger and flatter than the shells she was used to gather. She bent over and picked it up. It was much heavier than a shell, and on one of its sides was the outline, very faint, of a man's head. She had never seen a gold coin, but she knew that this was money that she held.

"Why, it looks like money!" she cried, and turned in question.

The funny man was gone!

"Well, I like *that*!" she exclaimed. "Do you call that manners, running away without even saying good-by to a lady?"

She peered around in every direction, but could see no trace of her friend.

"I bet you *have* a cave! Are you just trying to fool me?" she asked.

The lonely sands about her gave back no reply, though the long beach grass, bending in the wind, whispered, whispered.

"There!" said Pansy May. "I forgot to ask the funny old man why he has no eyelashes!"

IV

It was late afternoon before Papa and Mamma Kip saw the familiar trees of home looming across the marshland.

"Oh, Ed!" cried Mamma Kip, with a little sob. "I hate to give it up! I *can't* give it up, Ed!"

"Guess we've no choice," said Papa Kip somberly.

"A month more—only a month more! I can't bear it, Ed!"

"I've done my best, Kate."

"Don't I know that, dear? We should never have taken up the load in the first place. Better to have let him had the farm at the start, and gone elsewhere."

"Well, we can go elsewhere now."

"Not very far, Ed—certainly not so far as California. Anyhow, I want to stay here. I want Pansy May to grow up here."

"She's a queer kiddy; but she's all right as long as she has you."

"Yes, Ed, she's queer. She's queerer than you think. It's something handed down from the Evanses. They were Welsh, you know. They were all a little queer. It's in me, too, Ed, though I've never told you. Do you remember the last time that Pansy May went to the south beach, and I went and brought her back? Well, I saw something there, too—a thing like a shadow, seated on the sternpost of the old wreck. I could just make it out, and it faded away before I could get very near."

"Huh! So you're seeing things, too! I should say we *are* a family! Well, I've enough to see without seeing shadows, Kate. I can see old man Jackson, now, in my dreams. He's ghost enough for me."

"Do you know, Ed, I'm glad that we've never let Pansy May know anything about ghosts. She doesn't even know the meaning of the word."

"Not much meaning in it for her to know."

"I'm not sure, Ed. You can't tell me I didn't see *something*, whatever it was. It was *shaped* like a man, too."

"Shaped like a question mark, more likely," laughed her husband, as the eager horse turned in at the gate.

Pansy May was paying her respects to the family hop toad, which she had found reposing in the eastern flower bed.

"You look terribly wise," she informed that corpulent batrachian, "but it never seems to get you anywhere. You just blink, blink, blink, all day long. I'd hate to be *your* little girl!"

"Do leave that wretched old thing alone," said her mother. "One would think, to hear you go on, that you imagined it knew everything you were saying to it."

"He does know," asserted the child. "When I say nice things he stops blinking at me. That shows he's not bored any more. Oh, mamma, is money any good when it's yellow?"

"Yellow? You mean gold? Why, gold money's worth lots more than silver money or brown money."

"Oh, that's nice! I'll pay that old Mr. Jackson myself. Here!"

Pansy May held out the coin she had found at the old wreck.

"Why!" exclaimed her mother. "Where on earth did you find this?" She tossed the coin up and down in her small, hard palm. "It's gold! Ed! Ed! Come here quick! Pansy May's found a gold piece!"

Papa Kip came from the barn on the double quick.

"Here! Let me see it! Where did you find it?"

He reached eagerly for the coin.

"Yes, it's gold all right—not our money," he said. "Never saw that old chap's face before. He's some foreign king, I suppose. You say you found it at the old wreck?"

"Yes," said Pansy May. "My funny man showed it to me."

Her mother gave a little cry. Papa Kip merely stared at her.

"Well," he said, "however it may have come, this is worth looking into. Where's that spade?"

He started toward the barn.

"May I come too?" asked his daughter.

"Come? Course you can come! Let's get a move on, too. Only two more hours to see in!"

The old wreck lay in its wonted loneliness, the tide at far ebb, and the darkening skies empty save for the white flecks of homing gulls.

"Now show me where you found it," said Papa Kip; "but no more of this funny man stuff. It's beginning to give me the creeps."

"It was right here, papa—right here," the child told him, sticking a small finger in the dry, white sand.

Prodigies of toil ensued. Papa Kip threw spadeful after spadeful on the harder sand toward the bay, where Pansy May was stationed with directions to keep a sharp lookout for the glint of gold. Before he ceased, it was too dark to see a gold piece, unless one were to stoop closely and find it just under one's eyes.

"I guess that's all we can do to-day," said her father reluctantly. "We'll start in again first thing in the morning. Mother can do the milking."

He was as good as his word. Not the next day only, but three successive mornings saw him at his task, until the hole had become so deep that one standing a little distance away could not have seen his head. before he finally gave up, the few remaining ribs of the old wreck had been laid bare even to the crumbling keel.

"Nothing doing!" announced Papa Kip wearily. "I guess it was only a lone coin." He poked sadly among the ancient timbers. "She's old as the ark's lifeboat," he continued. "No wonder no one knows when she came ashore! Come, we must be going. I'm sorry I wasted all this time."

They strolled slowly homeward. The sun set, the wind went down, and twilight closed in around the old wreck like a subtler sea.

V

It was three weeks later. November had set in, and already there had been a flurry of snow. The apple trees stood leafless, and the osprey's nest in the big sycamore bulked black against the late and soberly colored dawns. There was vast activity in the Kip household. Old trunks and new wooden cases stood open on all sides, some of them full to the brim with family possessions, ancient or modern. Even Pansy May had been allotted a box, into which she had already packed many treasures, some of them of old standing and tried worth.

"Mamma," she asked for the twentieth time, "where are we going?"

"How many times must I tell you?" wearily replied her mother. "We're going to Hillsboro."

"Is it nice there?"

"Yes, very nice. Papa is going to work in a big store there, and you may ride in street cars and hear the bands play and go to the movies and—oh, lots and lots of nice things."

"What's street cars?"

"You'll find out soon enough. Now go on and get what you want into that box."

"May I bring Nathan?"

"Nathan? Who's Nathan?"

"You know—Nathan's the biggest hop toad."

"I should say not! The very idea—a hop toad!"

"There's lots of room for him, and I just know he'll be nice and quiet. He'll be so lonesome if we leave him here behind! I know he'll hate that old Jackson!"

"Well, he can't come, Jackson or no Jackson."

"Then I guess I'll go say good-by to him."

"You'll not find him. Don't you remember you've not seen him for weeks? He's not to be seen."

"Where is he, mamma?"

"Hibernating, of course, on account of the cold weather."

"What's hibernating?"

"Hibernating. You go into a hole in the ground and stay there all winter, to keep warm. Then, when the spring comes, and the snow has all melted, and the first flowers are coming up, you crawl out again and have a nice time all summer. Bears do it, and lizards, and—and things."

"I wouldn't like hibernating," said Pansy May firmly. "I couldn't make any snow cream if I was down in a hole under the ground."

She selected a doll, sadly in need of an oculist's attention, from a family of six, and proceeded to the front yard.

"Come, Eliza!" she said. "We'll have one more look for Nathan. I want to say good-by to him."

But Nathan was not to be found. Pansy May gave him up, and stood staring at the long, white line of the dunes.

"I s'pose it wouldn't really be polite to go away without saying good-by to my funny man," she said. "Come, Eliza! I want to introduce you to my funny man. He is most refined."

Sure enough, he was there, seated on the old stempost and gazing moodily into the pit that Papa Kip had dug. To face him, Pansy May was obliged to go down into the excavation, already partly refilled by the November gales; and once there, she had to look up at him from below.

"Let me introduce you to Eliza," she said. "Don't you like the nice deep hole my papa dug for you? You may use it for a cave, if you want to. This is my papa's beach. He was looking for another of those gold coins that we found. Do you know where there is another one? My papa wants it. Then we might not have to go away."

The shadowy figure began once more to tremble and blur.

"Do you mean that you are going to go away from here?" he asked in his far-away voice.

"Yes. That old Jackson is going to let some other folks live in our house, just because papa owes him a lot of money. We are going to a great big place to work in a nice store and hear the bands and ride in street cars and go to the movies and lots of wonderful things. Did you ever go to the movies?"

The funny man looked more pensive than ever.

"I'd rather you'd not go," he said. "I'm to leave this place soon, but you are better off here. I think—"

"Oh, why don't you come with us?" rudely interrupted the child. "You could ride in our wagon, and I could sit in your lap; and afterward we could ride in those street cars. Oh, yes! You *must* come! Papa and mamma will be so pleased—and the cat!"

The funny man smiled sadly, and turned his blurred eyes on the little girl for a moment.

"What a pretty pebble!" he exclaimed, and pointed behind her.

Pansy May turned. Sure enough, there, half hidden by the wind-blown sands, was the prettiest pebble she had ever seen. She bent, picked it up, and held it against the light. Green it was—a pure and tender green like that of young grass that grows in shadow. It was translucent, as large as an acorn, and shaped much like one. She stared in fascinated admiration.

"May I have it?" she asked.

No voice replied. Pansy May turned in surprise.

"Look, Eliza!" she exclaimed. "He's gone away again without so much as a fare-

thee-well! I don't call it very good manners. Nathan didn't say good-by to us, either; but I leave it to you, as your own fond mother, if a man oughtn't to have better manners than a hop toad."

If silence gives assent, Eliza and her mother were in complete accord in the matter. Pansy May crawled out of the pit, carefully clutching her gleaming prize, and started homeward. Then, as once before, she stopped with a frown.

"There!" she announced to a gull that hovered inquisitively overhead. "If I ain't the forgettingest thing! I was going to ask him if he hibernated."

A week later George Perkins met old Mr. Jackson in front of Wilson's general store. That ancient held up a forbidding hand.

"Don't say it," he exclaimed with austerity. "I know jest what you're a goin' to say, about that derved emerald that Ed Kip's girl found on the beach. I've heard enough of it!"

"They say it's wuth thutty thousand dollars, if it's wuth a cent," replied George Perkins.

"Waall, it warn't wuth a cent to me," said old Mr. Jackson, and proceeded grimly on his way.

THE CHAINS OF THE SEA

ONCE more

The waves roll up their colors on the shore.

Bereft,

The wind has robbed the sunlight that was left,

Where, stone on stone,

The burning, broken mountains stand alone.

Right royal sea,

Pale serf of feudal moons, why do they call you free?

Once more

The waves roll up their colors on the shore.

Right royal sea,

Send up a longer wave;

Right royal sea,

Send up the tide for me—

Another slave!

Mary Louise Mabie

Something Special

WAS IT A UNIQUE EXPERIMENT IN FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN
TOM AND LUCIE, OR WAS IT SOMETHING MUCH
COMMONER AND MORE SORDID?

By Mella Russell McCallum

SCOTT BARTOW came into the house with a brief "Hello," washed, and sat down to dinner. He did not notice the beautifully ironed centerpiece on the table, or the stylish arrangement of bread-and-butter plates and jumlbers.

"Tumbler to be placed at point of knife," Lucie had read somewhere.

With bowed shoulders, and in silence, Scott Bartow ate—noisily or clumsily, but with businesslike application to meat, potatoes, and gravy. Lucie, opposite with the coffeepot, watched him resentfully. What was the use of trying to serve meals nicely for a man like that?

"Don't go so fast, Scott! You don't know what you're eating."

"I'm hungry. Sure, I know what I'm eating. This pot roast is fine!" He cut off another slice of it with the well polished carving knife, and started to put it on his plate. "Oh, excuse me, Lucie—would you like some more?"

"No, thanks!"

When she rose to get the dessert, she hesitated a little, to let Scott look at her. She had on a new pink house dress, which brought out the pink of her cheeks; but Scott, his hunger three-fourths satisfied, was leaning back in his chair and whistling softly at the ceiling.

She brought in the apple sauce and chocolate cake.

"Good cake!" said Scott, and ate two pieces.

"What are you going to do to-night, Scott?"

"Read the paper and go to bed. I have to sleep every other night, you know."

Scott was taking a course in mechanical engineering at an evening school.

Lucie marked around a damask nasturtium with the tip of a spoon.

"It would be nice to have the Bowleses in to play cards."

"Nothing doing! You know I have to get my rest."

"Yes, I know." The pink color in Lucie's cheeks thickened. She pushed up the tendrils of light brown bobbed hair from her forehead. "Work and eat and sleep—that seems to be your idea of life!"

The young man rose with precision. He was dark, with a handsome, square-jawed face and wide shoulders. He shrugged wearily.

"It's not my idea of life at all, and you know it; but until I can honestly call myself a mechanical engineer, I've got to buckle down."

"It's always until something with you, Scott! At first we had a good time. Then you got it into your head you were going to be foreman—"

"Well, I got it, too, didn't I?"

"Yes—and what good does it do us? You aren't content with it. Now you must be a mechanical engineer. We were happier when you were just an operator."

Scott marched around the table and put his hands on her shoulders.

"My dear girl! Don't you realize that a man can't go on up in a business unless he fits himself for the positions ahead? You know I'm handicapped by not having gone to college; but I know, even if you don't, that I've got a head for engineering. So it's up to you!"

She wheeled around and away from him.

"Oh, yes, sure, it's up to me!" Her voice was unsteady with tears, which Scott hated. "It was up to me to be a good

scout when you went after the foreman job, and we stopped having any fun. After you get to be a precious mechanical engineer, then I suppose you'll decide to be president of the firm, and it'll be up to me some more! Oh, well—never mind! When I'm old and wrinkled, maybe you'll buy me a black silk dress and take me to Florida for a month!"

He stared at her for a moment, and then walked heavily into the living room. She heard him switch on the bridge light and sink into the easy chair under it. Then came the crackling of the evening paper. She ran to the kitchen, and buried her face in the most convenient muffler at hand, which happened to be the roller towel.

"He's just a machine!" she sobbed. "Work and eat and sleep! We haven't been to a show or a dance in ages; and all the time we aren't getting any younger. I'll grow old under his very nose, and he won't know it. He doesn't even s-see me any more!"

She stopped abruptly, for she thought she heard Scott coming. If he were to come now, and take her in his arms, and say he was sorry—call her his pretty sweetheart—

With quickened heart she waited. Scott did not come. He sat reading the paper under the lamp.

Lucie cried a few minutes longer. Then she bathed her face from the cold water tap, lifted her chin, and washed the dishes. She lingered in the rear of the house, doing little extra things, polishing the faucets unnecessarily, setting the table for breakfast, until, at nine o'clock, she heard Scott go upstairs.

When she entered the bedroom, he was already sleeping heavily, hunched small-boyishly on his side.

Before she turned out the light, she looked in the mirror. Above the line of her nightgown her neck rose straight and slender. Her short hair, combed down smoothly for the night, caught the light. Her brown eyes looked out at her like wistful flames.

What was the use of being young—and shining?

II

LUCIE's mother kept a boarding house on the other side of town. In a larger place Mrs. Winslow might have achieved a tea room, but in Sayreville an impoverished widow who liked to cook had little choice.

During the first year of her marriage Lucie had not gone home more than once a week, and then always with Scott; but after Scott had buckled down to get the foremanship, she had visited her mother more frequently. Now she went every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Those were the days of Scott's evening class. She went as early in the day as her housework would permit, for Scott did not come home to dinner on those nights.

There was always something going on at her mother's. It was more than a boarding house—it was a club for the homeless. The old piano loved to be played, and the slippers, faded Brussels rug loved dancing feet. Mrs. Winslow herself was the controlling spirit, and never lost any time unpinning the apron from her wide waist after the dinner was over; but her eyes became slightly troubled at the sight of her married daughter entering again into the fun of her parlor.

"You're sure Scott doesn't mind your coming home so much?" she asked Lucie.

"Not he!" Lucie patted her mother's cheek airily. "Scott's too busy learning to be an engineer."

"Have you two been quarreling?"

"N-no—not much; but he won't go anywhere, and he doesn't want me to work. I can't sit home and read all the time. You ought to be glad I choose to take my outings in my own mother's parlor!"

"I am glad," Mrs. Winslow said thoughtfully, and the trouble cleared from her eyes.

There was Mr. O'Rourke, manager of the Boston store, bald, old-fashioned, fifty-five. People said that the loss of his young wife and baby, thirty years ago, had broken his heart. Whether that was true or not, something had softened him into a wistful delight in the society of young people. He had been at Mrs. Winslow's for fifteen years.

There was Miss Kingsbury, palely lovely, and very wise, who had charge of the safe deposit vaults at the First National.

There were two young bank clerks with marvelous flat hair and an air of sophistication. Lucie patronized them, because she knew that really they were not sophisticated at all.

There was Tom Navarre, a thin, blond young man who worked on a newspaper, and who was always late to meals. Lucie's mother was partial to Tom Navarre, and it was an open secret that colored Mamie

would have laid herself down in the dust for him to walk on—such is the power of a pleasant smile.

Several stenographers and women teachers, an elderly professor, and three married couples, completed the personnel of Mrs. Winslow's.

When Lucie was there, she helped with the dinner. Sometimes she waited on table, to release Mamie for other tasks. She liked the stir of the kitchen and the long, chattering dining-room; but what she liked most was the hour or so in the parlor before she had to start home.

One Monday, arriving at her mother's in the early afternoon, Lucie found Mrs. Winslow in bed with a cold, and worrying about the dinner. Mamie could manage the roast and the vegetables, but her desserts were awful, and her salad—poor Mamie couldn't arrange plain lettuce on a plate without its looking pathetic.

"Don't you worry, mother dear!" Lucie took off her close, gold-colored hat in a businesslike way. "You trust me with the dinner."

"There's grapefruit in the refrigerator, and—"

"I'll find everything. You turn over and try to sleep, and don't worry any more."

Mrs. Winslow sighed in relief.

Lucie waited on table that evening, while Mamie carved and ladled in the kitchen. When it came to the salad, which was really nothing very wonderful—just skinless pieces of grapefruit heaped lightly on crisp lettuce, and topped with cream-filled mayonnaise—Tom Navarre took one taste, and spoke:

"My good friends, you are about to eat—a poem!"

Lucie laughed with the others. They were all looking at her. She felt her color rising. For a confused second she found herself looking into the dark blue, dancing eyes of the young newspaper man.

Like any woman, she was pleased at the compliment. It made her heart beat a little faster, as she made her way about the table, removing dishes. What an interesting face Tom Navarre had!

The dessert she had made was peach soufflé. As she arranged the glasses containing it upon the tray, she thought:

"A little praise is good for me!"

The dessert was served, and spoons were dipped in it. A second time Navarre's

voice mounted dramatically. From the pantry she could see him, spoon on high:

"I called the salad a poem, and it was; but the dessert, my friends—the dessert is the dream material of which poems are made!"

Again laughter. Lucie fled to the kitchen. She heard Mr. O'Rourke inquire:

"Who's your bootlegger, Navarre? I want to learn to talk pretty."

More laughter followed.

After the food was put away, and Mamie was singing, "I'se a waitin' at de ribber," over the dish-washing, Lucie went up to her mother. Mrs. Winslow was feeling better.

"That nap fixed me," she told Lucie. "I didn't worry a speck after you came. What were they all laughing about a while ago?"

Lucie told her.

"If that isn't just like that boy!" said Mrs. Winslow.

Lucie agreed that it was.

"Now you run down to the parlor for a little while before you go home."

"Oh, no—I'll stay with you."

"No—I want you to, really. Just smooth up my bed, and that's all."

Lucie made her mother comfortable for the night, and waved her a kiss.

"Give my love to Scott, and tell him not to work too hard."

"I'll tell him; but you know Scott."

Lucie wondered if Tom Navarre would still be in the parlor. Generally he wasn't, after eight o'clock.

He was there, sitting by himself on a sofa, with a book. Lucie was surprised to see how sad his face looked when he was not smiling. He looked up as she came in, and his eyes lighted.

"Come and sit down," he invited.

"Miss Kingsbury is going to play, and Miss Lucie is going to dance with me," interrupted Mr. O'Rourke.

"Oh, very well," said Tom Navarre; "but when Miss Lucie gets through dancing with you, perhaps she'll come back to me."

He had never called Lucie anything but Mrs. Bartow before.

Lucie listened idly to Mr. O'Rourke's conversation. When the one-step was over, she went back to the sofa.

"How's your mother's cold?" Tom Navarre asked.

"Much better, thank you."

"I'm glad of that. Do you know, this is the nearest to a home I've ever had."

"Mother'll like that."

"It's more than a boarding house."

"Mother does give it personality, doesn't she?"

"Yes and you do, too!"

His eyes danced.

Then Lucie danced with one of the bank boys, and with the professor, and by that time Tom Navarre had disappeared. She felt absurdly disappointed.

During the twenty-minute car ride across the city she scolded herself. How silly to feel elated because Tom Navarre had praised her—Tom Navarre, who made his living by arranging words!

Scott was asleep when she let herself in. She undressed dreamily. The salad was a poem! The dessert was the dream material of which poems were made!

A strange new current of restlessness stirred through her.

III

It would seem that if a wife does her duty, cooks nourishing meals, and doesn't nag, there is no great harm in dwelling apart in a dream world. That is what Lucie Bartow began to do.

Why not? Scott irritated her. She couldn't change him. Heaven knew she had tried! He was just a dull-boy-Jack, and that was all there was to it. Let him work his head off, if that was his idea of life! She would manage to get along by herself. After all, every one had a right to a little pleasure.

It did not occur to Lucie that she had never before felt called upon to defend herself for going home to her mother's parlor.

Not that she always saw Tom Navarre when she did go. Sometimes he did not come to dinner. Sometimes he left directly afterward; but, as Mr. O'Rourke observed, there was no doubt that Navarre was getting the "parlor habit."

"We all come to it in time, my boy," said the store manager.

"Well, I can stand it," answered Tom Navarre cheerfully.

He did not dance well, nor did he care much for dancing. He was too apt to let other couples bump into his partner. Poker was the only card game he would bother to play, and Mrs. Winslow didn't like to have them play poker there. What he liked to do best was to talk about books

and economics and history. It made Lucie feel like an ignoramus to hear him.

In high school Lucie had received good marks. Gracious, how rusty she had become since she married Scott Bartow! She must renew her library card, and catch up on things.

Tom Navarre was sure of himself when he talked. Sometimes he was positively domineering; but there was one thing that silenced him. That was when the professor played real music, after Miss Kingsbury's jazz.

The professor had been a musician of considerable reputation until an accident had stiffened his left wrist. Even now he played every Sunday in the First Congregational Church.

The keys of Mrs. Winslow's piano were yellow, and slightly drawn apart, like old teeth; but when the professor touched them, Tom Navarre's eyelids would flutter curiously, and he would grow still. Then he would close his eyes and seem to go off by himself. Lucie had never before seen any one so affected by music.

The professor was temperamental. He would play only when the mood was on him. Perhaps that was why he played so well.

One evening, after an hour of jazz, the pensive and lovely air of the "Méditation" from "Thaïs" cut through the atmosphere of inconsequential gayety. The "Méditation," beloved by violinists, played on a tinkly old piano! No one but the professor in the right mood would have dared do it.

Tom Navarre started. Before he closed his eyes to enjoy the music, he looked quickly at Lucie. He seemed to be inviting her to go with him, beyond, into that little personal world of his.

Lucie enjoyed the "Méditation" as she never had before.

Tom never flirted with her, and never singled her out openly; but there were moments, like this one, when he seemed to flash her a special message.

Thus two months drifted by, and it was midwinter.

Then, suddenly, he did single her out openly. One evening, at the last minute, he asked her to go with him on a newspaper pass to hear Elman play.

Mrs. Winslow's eyes clouded.

"What will Scott think?"

"Scott wants me to have a good time; and I'd just love to hear a really fine vio-

linist, mother. If Scott doesn't like it, I'll never do it again."

That sounded reasonable enough.

They didn't talk much at the concert—just blotted in the music. Then Tom put her on the street car, and she went home alone.

Scott didn't mind. At breakfast he said he was glad she had had the chance to go. The fatigue circles around his eyes gave Lucie a pang.

Poor old Scott! Why wouldn't he listen to reason, and stop killing himself?

As Lucie became better acquainted with Tom Navarre, she discovered that he was not satisfied with being just a city reporter. For two years he had been doing popular articles on economics for the Chicago Sunday *Times*. Just now he was trying to get a special assignment that would take him to Australia.

"My gracious, why haven't you told us about your fame?" she asked him.

"Oh, I don't know!" He was genuinely embarrassed. "The fellows at the office know about it, of course. Besides, it's not fame."

Now here was a strange thing, Lucie thought—Tom would talk endlessly, domineeringly, about something that some one else had written, yet he had never mentioned his own ambitions.

"What I want to do, if I've got it in me, is to work into the sort of thing Ray Stannard Baker has always done. Does that sound awfully conceited, Lucie?"

"Of course not!"

"If I can get this one assignment, and make good on it, and other papers see what I can do, I'll never have to go back to straight reporting."

"I think that's just a wonderful idea!" Lucie said.

She thought about him a great deal when she was by herself, sewing, doing her housework—his ambition, about which he was so strangely modest; his love of music; his obstreperous arguing; his alternating moods of sadness and gaiety.

One evening he went all the way home with her.

"Thanks for bringing me," she said; "but it wasn't a bit necessary."

"I wanted to see your house."

"Come to dinner some evening, and see the inside. It's quite pretty."

"Thank you, I think not."

"Why not?"

"Sleeping dogs!" he said, and his eyes danced.

Lucie was annoyed. Why, this was flirting! She wished he would go. It was too absurd, standing outside here, like a girl with a beau.

Apparently he had no intention of going.

"You know, you've got a mind," he announced, lounging against the porch railing.

"I never went to college," she protested.

"That makes no difference. You have—what shall I call it—the understanding intelligence. You're the only woman I like to talk to."

"Don't be ridiculous, Tom! Think of all the clever girls you know."

He did not reply to that. He seemed obsessed by his own phrase.

"That's it—the understanding intelligence," he repeated.

"Well, thanks, kind sir, I'm sure!"

Lucie kept her tone gay. They exchanged a good night, and she went in.

She must be careful, she warned herself, not to take seriously anything that Tom Navarre said. It was nice to be liked, to be told that she had a mind, and all that; but she mustn't let it get under her skin, she decided.

She didn't worry about it. She was sure she was too sensible. Moreover, she was Scott Bartow's wife. Scott was a mighty fine husband, even if he did insist on being a dull-boy-Jack.

Come to think of it, it was fine of Scott not to be jealous of her good times at her mother's, or about the concert. She didn't want to be the least bit disloyal to Scott, ever.

Still, there was no disloyalty in having this friendship by herself. She and Scott could never like Tom Navarre mutually. Tom wasn't Scott's style. Scott didn't like onions, and she did, while Scott liked rice, which she detested. Food or friendship, one was entitled to one's individual taste.

One morning a few weeks later, while Lucie Bartow, in her pink apron dress, was wielding the dust mop, Tom Navarre rang the doorbell.

"I was sent out this way," he exclaimed.

"Aren't you going to ask me in?"

"Of course! Come in!"

He looked her over gayly.

"I like the uniform," he said. "Pink is for you."

More pink came into her face.

He examined the house whimsically. He praised the embroidered linens. He sat down for a moment in Scott's chair under the lamp. He admired the blue and white kitchen that was so clean.

"I don't suppose you'd keep me for lunch, and let me eat in the kitchen," he said wistfully.

"I'll make you a roast lamb sandwich, and give you some tea and a piece of orange layer cake."

It was an adventure—he perched on the white enamel stool, she opposite in the blue and white painted chair. They smiled across at each other.

"We're good pals, aren't we?" he said.

"Yes, Tom. There's no harm being pals."

She wished she had not uttered that last sentence. Response flared in his eyes.

"No," he agreed. "This isn't flirtation. It's just—something special in friendship."

When he left, a few minutes later, he took her hands for a brief moment.

"Something—special," he repeated.

She liked that. All the afternoon she thought about it. She had read of wonderful friendships between men and women—beautiful, wholesome relationships, that had nothing to do with marriage. How marvelous, she thought, that such a thing should come to her!

And so, more months drifted by, and it was April.

IV

"WANT some chop suey?"

Tom Navarre was walking home across the city with Lucie. They often did that now. It was half past nine o'clock.

"Why, I don't know," wavered Lucie.

"Of course, if you think we'd better not—I fully realize that you have to think of appearances."

Why did such a thing as "appearances" have to figure in a friendship? But it had figured several times lately.

Sayreville did not boast many Chinese restaurants. The one to which they went now was familiar to Lucie. She and Scott used to come there after dances in the old days.

There was a large room with ancient tables inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The tables never seemed quite clean, to Lucie. Along the sides were private stalls, seating four, curtained with bead and straw por-

tières, which gave a brittle rustling when they were touched.

The waiter led them to a stall. Lucie felt troubled. Yet why? She had given Tom lunch in her own house a number of times. Scott knew that. She would tell Scott about it to-night.

They gave their order.

"I sail from San Francisco on the 10th of May," Tom said suddenly.

"What?" Lucie couldn't believe it.

"I saw the editor in chief last week when I was in Chicago. He gave me the assignment I wanted."

"Oh, do tell me about it, quick!"

"He's willing to gamble on me, he says. He says I have a fresh grasp of economic conditions, although I'm short on experience. He's human enough to realize that a man must start somewhere."

"Oh, I'm so glad! Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Tom looked at her somberly.

"Because—I'm not sure I want to go now."

"Not want to go! Why, you'll get other assignments—you'll go all over the world. It's simply wonderful for you!"

"Yes. Yes, I suppose so."

While she was frowning upon his lack of enthusiasm, his hands flung themselves across the table and gripped hers.

"Lucie! Lucie!" The wistfulness in his eyes hurt. Could a friendship mean so much as that, she wondered? "Why did you marry, Lucie? Why didn't you know—that I would come?"

Then he was around the table, beside her, the light flaring in his eyes.

"I don't want to go—unless you'll go too!" he whispered.

"Hush, Tom! You're insane!"

"Lucie, look at me!"

Her heart was pounding fast, but she looked steadily. She had the feeling that her sane, steady look would save the situation; but when he pulled her close to him, a shower of tears shook her, and she let her head droop against him.

There was a discreet rustling at the portières—oh, most discreet. Tom went back to his side of the table, and she straightened her hat. There was plenty of time for that before the bland waiter inquired:

"You wantee more?"

"Nothing more. The check, please."

Lucie wondered how Tom could speak so coolly. Outside, he put her on a street car.

"I'll call you up in the morning," he said.

"No, don't. It's a party line. You mustn't!"

"Then you call me—at noon. Go out to a booth. Will you?"

"Yes," she promised.

On her way home she thought:

"But the friendship—*where has the friendship gone?*"

Those quick tears that she had shed—were they for the passing of the friendship? She didn't know.

She found Scott foraging in the kitchen.

"Haven't any cold cocoa, or something, have you, Lucie?"

"No, but I'll make some fresh—it won't take two jerks—and I'll give you a nice toasted sandwich."

"That 'll be fine business!" he accepted wearily.

He sat sprawled in the blue and white chair while she went about the necessary preparations.

"Aren't you eating, too, Lucie?" Scott asked her.

"I'm not hungry."

She watched him, emotions churning within her. She did not feel happy, she did not feel unhappy, but excited beyond reasoning.

Scott looked dead-alive, as he sat there eating his sandwich and drinking his cocoa. There was no light in him—no nervous fire.

"He doesn't even see me," she thought.

"My cheeks are burning—I can feel them—but he doesn't see it."

She hurried upstairs ahead of him. She could not bear the sight of him, eating and drinking in weary contentment.

In their room she looked about a little wildly. If she dared to sleep in the guest room to-night! How could she house her excitement in these four walls, with Scott, to-night?

But Scott would think that that was queer; and now that things really were a bit queer, they mustn't look so!

She pretended to be asleep when he came in; but she got no sleep all night. She lay tied in a hard knot.

The hard knot continued in the morning. She did her housework automatically. She ordered the groceries—wiped up the linoleum—mended Scott's best shirt where it was getting thin—made a rice pudding for Scott's dinner.

At noon she was going to call up Tom. She had promised. Going out to a private pay booth, just like that flirtatious Mrs. Heath up the street! Well, she was going to do it, anyway!

But what on earth should she say when she did call him up?

San Francisco—the South Seas—romance! Wonderful romance, so close to her hand!

Scott didn't care about traveling. Probably she would never get away from Sayreville, with Scott so anchored there.

But who was Scott? A dead-alive, blind, drudging, eating, sleeping animal!

The groceries came at eleven o'clock. She went upstairs to change her dress. In the honest daylight she looked at herself in the mirror.

"I'm only a girl yet," she said aloud.

Soon she wouldn't be a girl. Soon she would drift into early middle age. Then would come middle age, and then old age. All the time Scott wouldn't see; and when they got old, and he was too stiff to work, he might take her to Florida for the winter. Thrifty old men did that for their toil-worn wives.

She wanted things now—now, while youth was keen! Not material things, but life itself, with beauty and romance and zest!

The doorbell stabbed her. She knew it was Tom Navarre.

"You shouldn't have come here!" she told him, white-faced.

"I know. I was so afraid you wouldn't call me."

"I was going to."

"What were you going to say, Lucie?"

He stood still. Only his eyes were not still.

"I don't know, Tom," she said, but she did know. She felt suddenly relaxed. The hard knot was out. A curious, powerful calmness came to her. "I think—I'll have to go with you, Tom!"

He put his arms around her and kissed her. Then, quite docilely, he went away.

V

THIS calmness! Lucie's being was an orderly mechanism, thinking, feeling, serenely. All the other people in the world were dolls, with mechanisms that didn't work quite right.

Scott was a doll. Poor, dull Scott! Her mother, colored Mamie, Mr. O'Rourke—

all of them were dolls. They were puppets, walking as if they were alive, fooling one another, but not fooling her!

She was going away. She was strong, and strong people did not stay among dolls. She was going away on a white ship with Tom Navarre, riding on blue water, headed for the South Seas. At night, Tom said, the ship would be white alabaster, riding on velvet water, under a velvet sky. There would be great, heavy, warm stars hanging in the velvet sky.

"You aren't looking well, Lucie," her mother said one day.

"I'm all right, mother."

Now wasn't that just like a doll? Lucie had never felt so well or looked so well. She pitied the people she would leave behind. Her mother would take it badly, would not understand at all. It made her sad to think of her mother not understanding; and Scott—

Would Scott put the note in his pocket and go off to evening class? Or would he skip class for one night?

Why had she tangled up her life in this way? Had she experienced no warning not to marry Scott, no premonition of a true love not yet arrived? She couldn't remember any such feeling.

But it didn't matter. A strong person could untangle himself. When your true love came, you had to untangle yourself, didn't you, and go?

Tom was to start three days ahead of her. A friend of his was arranging things in California. There were messy arrangements to be made before you could sail away serenely on the white ship. There would be a sordid side, a scandal side, too. That was too bad!

Did the usual newspaper scandal often cover romance like this? Lucie recalled items that she had read, with such lurid headlines as—

Mrs. A. in Reno—opera singer named.

Mr. B. procuring a Paris divorce—runaway pair traced—wife a probable suicide.

Oh, no, no, no, there could not be real romance and fineness behind most stories like those! Most affairs were mere sordid intrigues; but not hers—not hers!

The unemployed women at Mrs. Winslow's boarding house were in the habit of having tea every afternoon in Mrs. Goodwin's sitting room. Lucie and her mother had a standing invitation to attend, and

often did so. Lucie helped Mrs. Goodwin with the cups and things.

Two days before Lucie was to leave she found herself taking the oddly assorted cups from the bookcase where Mrs. Goodwin kept them, and placing them on the lacquered tray beside the samovar. Mrs. Goodwin made tea with ceremony.

"How will you have your tea, Mrs. Clark?" she would inquire—as if she didn't know!

"Mostly hot water, and a little lemon, please."

"And you, Miss Witter?"

"Oh, let me have it strong—strong and naked!"

Miss Witter was the house wit. Oh, dolls, dolls, poor old dolls, with their tea party, Lucie thought!

The topic of the day was the newest scandal. A Chicago bank cashier had run away with a woman, leaving his wife, and financing the venture with stolen securities. He had been caught and brought back.

"Listen to the statement he gives out!" shrieked Miss Witter.

"I am sorry I have caused suffering to my wife, but something special, that was stronger than myself, drew me. Mine was no sordid temptation, no matter how it may appear in the eyes of the world."

"Piffle!" snapped Mrs. Goodwin, and her 1905 pompadour nodded.

"Oh, sure!" added Lucie's mother, in her sane, easy tones. "They always think their own case is special."

Lucie looked at her mother. The broad, familiar face was serene, as always. For days and days Mrs. Winslow had been a doll, but now, as Lucie looked, her countenance took on meaning. Its deep-etched lines told of tolerance and conquered sorrow. It was more than a serene face—it was a triumphant face. Would it go on being serene—go on being triumphant—after Lucie was gone?

"If you don't mind, mother, I won't stay for dinner to-night," Lucie said, when they went downstairs.

"All right, my dear."

Lucie walked home. That took an hour. She found her house still, save for the two clocks—the mahogany clock on the mantel, which had been Mr. O'Rourke's wedding gift, and the alarm clock that stayed in the kitchen by day and beside Scott's bed by night.

She walked through the rooms. Lately she had not considered those rooms overmuch. She had just cleaned them, like a competent maid. Now fragments of history plucked at her.

That blue velours couch cover, what a time they had had about it! Gorman's store had been horrid, intimating that they had damaged it themselves. Scott had threatened to remove his charge account. That was a joke, because their account wasn't worth fifty dollars a year to Gorman's; but the bluff had worked.

"How do they know but that we may inherit a million some day?" Scott had said at the time.

The blue and white kitchen linoleum—Scott had bought it wholesale, through the firm. Lucie had wanted yellow, but they had had to keep it, because it was all cut.

"I thought a bride's kitchen was always blue and white!" Scott had said in distress; and she had come to like it, and to wonder why she had ever wanted a yellow kitchen.

She went upstairs and lay on her bed; but that wasn't good for her street dress. She rose to change into a kimono. The thought came, why not go to bed entirely? Why not lie between the smooth sheets—and rest? She didn't want any dinner. In the morning she would be herself again.

The opened bed was pleasant. How good it felt! She curved the pillow to the height she liked. She was so—tired!

When she was eight years old her father had brought home a brown, curly dog named Beggar, for a birthday present. What a silly thing to think of just now! Years later, when Beggar was old and very fat, her father died.

"Take care of your mother, Lucie," he said; and Beggar's thick tail drooped.

But her mother had never needed to be taken care of. Mrs. Winslow had always taken care of her daughter, instead. She had seen Lucie through high school. Together they had made her trousseau.

Oh, of course, she had been obedient, and helpful around the boarding house. She had been a good daughter; but she had never really taken care of her mother.

Over to the west lay a blue sea, with a white ship, waiting—a ship that would become alabaster in the velvet night; and there would be great, swaying stars in the sky above!

She really ought to set pancakes for Scott's breakfast. Scott worked so hard—

he needed good food; but she was so—tired!

She began to cry; and, as she cried, from all directions the tides swept in. She did not resist them—she could not. She let them sweep over her. A tide of history that had to do with a brown curly dog and a blue velours couch cover, and lots of concrete fragments, met and fought with a tide of unrest and longing. The tide of unrest was violent; but the history tide had no end to it—no end of concrete fragments—no end!

Long before Scott came home from evening class she knew that she was not going away.

She heard his indrawn whistle of surprise at finding her in bed so soon. He tiptoed around carefully.

VI

In the morning Lucie was too ill to get up. Scott brought her coffee, and telephoned her mother.

"I knew you were working too hard over there," he said.

After he had gone to work she lay quietly, crying a little—not for anything in particular, it seemed, but just because she was tired. At ten o'clock her mother came, with a glass fruit jar full of soup.

"I wish Scott could take you away for a little while," Mrs. Winslow said. "You've looked all worn out for some time."

"Scott couldn't do that, mother. He's too busy learning to be an engineer."

"Scott is an engineer." Mrs. Winslow walked over to the window and adjusted the shade. "He is what is called a practical engineer now. He told me over the phone."

Lucie sat up.

"He didn't tell me!"

"I guess he was too much concerned about your being sick."

Lucie lay back. Her heart pounded with slow, heavy beats.

"There was a time," she thought, "when he would have waked me up at night to tell me a thing like that!"

The alarm clock filled the short silence.

"I'm going downstairs to heat up this soup and to look after your furnace fire, Lucie," Mrs. Winslow said. "The house is chilly."

The stairs creaked under Mrs. Winslow's descending weight.

So Scott had attained his heart's desire, and had not told Lucie! Well, she didn't blame him much. She had never been interested in that engineer business; and yet it was just as fine and ambitious as writing special assignments on the other side of the world.

Mrs. Winslow couldn't stay long. There were the boarders to be considered. Lucie knew how the trip across the city had already upset her mother's day.

"You look like a little girl, somehow, this morning, Lucie," said her mother, leaning over and kissing her.

"Oh, mother, if you knew—"

"Perhaps I do—a little—but it doesn't matter, as long as everything is all right. Good-by, dear!"

Through the long day Lucie wondered if her mother really suspected the truth. She decided not. Oh, no, certainly not!

She thought of other things that long day. Tom Navarre—would his career be wrecked?

No, his career would not be wrecked. Tom would go on. He would be hurt, and the hurt would make a new light in his blue eyes—for a long time, perhaps; but he would go on, and perhaps he would do better work in the end because of this—this special relationship.

Special!

"I have certainly been a rotter!" Lucie told herself.

She wondered if she would ever tell Scott about it—not now, but some time. Well, perhaps!

The future stretched grayly, but oh, so

calmly and peacefully! When she grew old, as she must some day, there would be an advantage of a sort in having a husband who didn't see wrinkles and gray hairs. Tom Navarre would see everything. Ah, yes, there was an advantage about a blind man!

When Scott came in, at six o'clock, she told him she was glad about the engineering course.

"It seems dreadful to have to find it out from mother instead of you," she added.

"I know." Scott smoothed the counterpane painstakingly, and stared out through the window. "Your mother's been bawling me out about neglecting you, Lucie."

Ah, complex mother!

"I haven't been sympathetic. I've been selfish, Scott!"

He apparently didn't hear that.

"She got me all stirred up, in fact," he went on. "You know the new plant we're putting up in California? Well, some one's got to install the machinery. It lies between Rawlins and me, and the chances are—what are you crying for? Wouldn't you like to go West for a year, and stop off a couple of weeks in the Rockies?"

"No, Scott! I want to stay here—right here, and—and show you what a wife ought to be. Really I do, Scott! Tell them you don't want to go."

Scott looked bewildered. Then he grinned, and pretended to wipe sweat from a dripping brow.

"I ask you"—he addressed an unseen audience—"I ask you honestly, can you beat it?"

TO A BIRD IN APRIL

SINGER singing at my door,
Bird of April, sing no more!
Save indeed you can bring back
All the singing years before,
Bird of April, sing no more!

Bird of April, had you heard,
Sweeter far than any bird,
Those old voices still I hear,
Look'd into those far-off places,
Wandered into hidden places,
Still to me so near—
Singer singing at my door,
You would sing no more!

Andrew C. McIver

The Cross of Truchas

THE STORY OF A STRANGE CONFLICT OF HIDDEN POWERS

By W. P. Lawson

XVII

WHEN Claire Innes found herself set upon so unexpectedly, her struggles were of short duration. It is possible that if the numbing consciousness of Ramon's change of heart had not been with her, she would have given up less easily; but an apathy had settled down upon her. Once more she had made a fatal mistake in the hazardous game of life, and in her cruel humiliation she cared little what became of her.

She felt herself being carried through the woods for what seemed a long distance. She wondered dully whether Ramon was with her, or whether they had left him where he fell. It mattered little. He was dead to her—that was the bitter fact which she must learn to face.

She could hear the shuffle and thud of moving feet, the rustling sound of brushwood being pushed aside. Presently she became aware of faint groans behind her. Ramon still lived!

For some reason the knowledge plunged her into a deeper depression than before. Had he died, grief for him might have blunted the sharp edge of self-pity; now the obtruding thought of her abandonment filled her whole mind.

The man who carried her stopped, and there was a low-voiced interchange of words. She was lifted on a horse and placed in the saddle, astride.

"So that you keep your seat and make no outcry, *señorita*," said a harsh voice, "there is no need to bind you."

She grasped the saddle horn with both hands and thrust her feet into the stirrups. It was her own mount, she surmised from the feel of the saddle beneath her. The cloak about her head was unwound, and a handkerchief was tied across her eyes.

The groans behind her sounded louder. A horse snorted in fright. The cavalcade moved off in single file.

How long they rode Claire could not say. She knew that she was in the hands of the Penitentes, but what dreadful fate was to be hers she could not guess. Concerning this she had only tales of their dark deeds to guide her—these and the warnings of her friends; but what might happen did not trouble her. How could she suffer more than she was suffering now?

She was a fool, of course. She had always been a fool; yet it was scarcely her own fault, she reflected miserably, that she was endowed with a strength of passionate emotion which at times overcame her better judgment.

She recalled Quintana's words of warning, and hated him for being right in his prediction of disaster; but she herself had known the hazard of her course, and had tried to curb her infatuation for Ramon de Vargas. The disease had grown in spite of the counsel of reason, of the caution that experience had given her. Knowing herself unlucky in that field, she had gambled once again for happiness, and had lost.

Courage was what she needed now, as the fire guard had foreseen; but courage for the moment was lacking. She felt that she could not bear the trial that had come upon her. She longed for death—for lasting peace.

She heard the sound of running water, beside which they rode. Then the horses' hoofs struck on rock, and they went more slowly. A little later they stopped. Claire was lifted from her horse, and the bandage was removed from her eyes.

For a moment she was blinded by the sun. Then, as her sight grew stronger, she saw that they were in an oval valley shut in by cliffs. Above the cliffs timbered

mountains rose sheer. The base of Truchas Peak formed the north boundary of the vale, and the cross on the rocky face of the mountain loomed high above—almost directly overhead, it seemed.

They had ridden to the upper end of the inclosed area, and had dismounted before a rude log cabin that stood there. Riderless horses stood about. At a few paces' distance two men—whom Claire recognized as Pedro, Don Tomaso's one-eyed servant, and a youth named Vincente Baca, also a dependent of Montoya's—were lowering the unconscious form of Ramon de Vargas from the back of a horse to the ground.

Before her stood Don Tomaso, gazing at her sternly.

"The *señorita* will be well advised," he said, "to make no effort at escape. The walls of your cage are adequate."

He waved a hand at the precipitous cliffs that shut in the valley on both sides. The girl's spirit, supine before, became reanimate at his contemptuous tones.

"You are bold against an unarmed woman!" she said bitingly. "Is it permitted to ask the occasion of this outrage, and what you plan regarding me?"

Montoya's eyes were malevolent.

"You may ask, *señorita*—yes. You will be answered to-night, following the meeting of the council. In the meantime"—he indicated the cabin by a gesture—"this shelter is accorded you. Lest you should seek to abuse our lenience, know that one stands on guard to prevent your flight, till you are summoned to the bar of judgment."

At his brusque command Claire entered the hut, thankful that some freedom of movement, at least, was left her.

There was one room only, she saw, with a window at the side. The door opened on the lower and open end of the valley. Ashes lay on the cold hearth; crude furniture remained from some former tenancy.

The girl stood near the center of the room, staring about her. She turned at a sound in the doorway. They were bringing in the body of Ramon. His face was deathly pale, his eyes were closed. A stain of blood on his shirt, over the left breast, showed where the bullet had entered.

Pedro and Baca deposited their burden in a corner of the room, on saddle blankets thrown upon the floor. Montoya, kneeling by the prone form, dressed the wound roughly.

"The ball glanced on a rib," he muttered

as he rose. "He will live for the ordeal, *amigos!*"

So saying he left, with Pedro and a fourth man whom Claire did not know. The youth, Vincente, a rifle in his hand, seated himself on the threshold of the doorway, gazing at the girl impassively. It occurred to Claire that information might be gained through converse with her jailer.

"Tell me, Vincente," she said, "why should Montoya trouble to lay hands on Ramon and myself ere the council has rendered a verdict in our case?"

Vincente grinned sourly. In times past he had been an unsuccessful suitor for the hand of Dolores. The present situation of his erstwhile rival and the *Americana* gave him much pleasure.

"Don Tomaso is doubtless forehanded," he returned, nothing loath to discuss the diverting subject of the captives' coming torture. "When the nature of the penalties are decided, you and Don Ramon will be produced forthwith. The affair can be concluded to-night, with no unnecessary delay intervening."

"But suppose the council should not support Don Tomaso—suppose we should be cleared of the charges made against us?"

Vincente shrugged.

"In that case, *señorita*, I fear that you will disappear, never to be seen more."

Claire shuddered involuntarily. She saw clearly now—too clearly, in truth—the mechanism of the plot hatched in Montoya's brain. However the council might decide, the death of the two prisoners would follow, in one way or another. On this, apparently, the Penitente leader was determined.

She moved to the little window and gazed out unseeingly. There was deep regret in her heart—not that she must die, but that she must die unloved, with the cold fact that she was wedded standing as a bar between her and Ramon. Why had she not held her peace, she asked herself wretchedly? If she had only known what was to happen to them both! How easy to have preserved in the young man's heart the unsullied image he had known as hers before the revelation of her married state had shattered it!

She stood leaning on the window sill for long, while the sun drifted across the sky, till the shadows on the grass outside the cabin lengthened. She was calmer now, almost resigned, but unutterably lonely.

Her life passed slowly before her mind's eye—a short life as years go, but full of error and misfortune. Could she have bettered it, she wondered, had she to live it once again? She did not know. She had been misled throughout by her own nature; yet how could she act other than in accordance with her nature?

One consolatory quality she had always possessed hitherto—courage: but that had failed her in this acid test. Could she not regain it before the end? Would not pride enable her to renounce, to endure, to face her loss candidly, and to rise above it?

The ashes of courage held embers from which flame started. Her spirit reawakened and grew bold. She would face not only the torture of the Penitentes, but the sharper ordeal that had wrung her inmost soul! She would die undefeated by life—by life which she had dared to face equipped only with love and a reckless thirst for happiness.

A sound from behind broke through the spell of self-absorption that had come upon her. She turned swiftly, to see Ramon's wide eyes shining in the dusk.

For a moment she did not move or speak. The youth's face was devoid of expression. His eyes glittered feverishly, but there was no aversion in them now.

"I have had a dream, *señorita*," he said faintly, "wherein my soul was freed from sin by the pangs of an atonement. I would have judged you, but recently; now I have been shown that I can judge only for myself, with the inner consciousness of sin as my guide. You found no sin in what you proposed to me, and therefore I would have judged you; but I do so no longer. It is in my mind to ask your forgiveness for my thoughts against you!"

Claire's face was calm, but her voice trembled slightly as she answered:

"Were there need for forgiveness, I would forgive you freely, Ramon; but there is none. We think differently—that is all. Our natures and the manner of our lives have made us different. Your sense of sin is based on a conception of God's will interpreted by men whom you revere, mine by my conception of God as He reveals Himself to me through the dim channels of my soul. So be it! I, too, have had a dream—a pleasant dream while it lasted. I am awake now—till the shadow of a long night falls, and dreams and facts both cease."

He was staring about the room; it seemed as if he had not heard what she said.

"Where are we?" he asked wonderingly.

She told him all that had occurred, and spoke of what was likely to occur that night.

"We shall both, doubtless, suffer an ordeal of atonement," she ended with a wry smile.

Joy shone in Ramon's eyes, and a look of exaltation flamed in his white face.

"My dream was a true one!" he murmured. "Yet I am minded not to wait for the brethren to come hither and drag me forth, as one unwilling to suffer for his soul's sake. Rather would I go to meet the trial of absolution, and proclaim my sin abroad ere penance be imposed!"

"You would seek the Penitentes?" she cried incredulously.

"I have misjudged the value of the order to one *in extremis*," he replied in a hushed voice.

Before she knew what he was about, he had risen from the corner where he lay and was staggering toward the door.

Vincente, who had been watching Ramon with avid eyes, backed a few feet from the doorway, raising his rifle threateningly.

"Seek not to emerge, Ramon de Vargas!" he cried warningly. "I am set to guard you till the moment of your judgment. A prior exit from your cage will mean only death, not salvation!"

Ramon advanced steadily, as if the other's voice had failed to reach his understanding. Claire thought that he must be delirious, so wild were his eyes, so exultant his demeanor.

Vincente ground his teeth vindictively and raised his weapon to his shoulder. His finger was crooked about the trigger when the girl, with a shrill cry, sprang forward and threw herself before his intended victim.

XVIII

JUAN's task of trailing the abducted party was thoroughly congenial. The Indian trod the forest floor warily, finding no difficulty in following the tracks left by his quarry, and keeping an eye forward against surprise. Montoya's band had walked a hundred yards or more in a southerly direction, had mounted horses tethered there, and had ridden eastward into the deeper fastnesses of the woods.

The trail led over ridges and across cañons, and traversed the heart of the forest. Not yet did Juan guess their destination; but as the hoofprints bore gradually to the north, and led up the cañon of the Gallinas—a small stream heading in the foothills of Truchas Peak—an inkling of Montoya's goal entered the Indian's mind.

Soon the cañon "boxed," with rock walls ahead and on either hand. The way seemed blocked—but it was not blocked, Juan knew. The trail swung abruptly to the right and followed a hidden passage that threaded the seemingly impassable walls of stone. Beyond this the narrow cañon opened out into a cliff-encircled valley—the Hole in the Hills, as it was called. There, Juan surmised, would the captives be sequestered, at least temporarily.

He stopped short, debating whether to follow farther. He had learned what he chiefly sought to discover—the whereabouts of his master and the *Americana*. To essay the pass meant more than a possibility of detection. Should he not rather make all speed to the ranger's cabin and disclose his findings to Quintana?

Yet the impulse to advance was strong. If only he could see Don Ramon before he left, make sure that the prisoner was still alive, perhaps get speech with him!

Juan's indecision bade fair to cost him dear. As he stood there, weighing the matter in his mind, the click of an iron shoe sounded from the passage not twenty paces ahead. Low voices were audible—were coming straight toward him!

The trapped spy gazed hastily about, a chill at his vitals. To left and right the cañon walls were impossible to scale. The approaching men were mounted; he was on foot. Short shrift would be his, he knew, if once they set eyes on him!

He invoked the good offices of the saints desperately. His eyes roved busily along the blank walls on either hand. *Gracias!* His heart gave a bound. Not ten yards to the rear was a small opening in the face of a cliff—the entrance to a shallow cave. It was the matter of a moment for Juan to leap back and plunge head first into the tunnel, even as the foremost of the horsemen emerged from the pass.

There were two, the Indian noted, as he listened to the voices of the passing riders. Don Tomaso was speaking now, in his harsh, dry tones:

"It is you, José, that I must trust to

notify the brethren of our meeting to-night. Pedro will guard the passage; Vincente is stationed with the prisoners. Bear word only to those whose names I have given you. We want no traitors present!"

The voice of José Candelario replied:

"It shall be as you order, Don Tomaso. And the password?"

"San Ildefonso," said Montoya.

The voices grew fainter, the hoofbeats died away. Juan crept out, tired and dust-covered; yet his heart was light. The knowledge that he bore would be welcome to Quintana!

There was but a single way out—the trail that the two riders had taken. Juan waited, curbing his impatience, till they had had time to ride beyond the narrow mouth of the valley; but why, he thought as he waited, should he waste the hour or more it would require to reach Moore's cabin on foot? There was the fire station that Quintana had built on the ridge immediately to the east of the cañon where Juan stood. A telephone was installed there for the guard's use. Why not go to that point and phone a report to the Mexican?

This was the plan that the Indian followed. Within a short half hour he was nearing the top of the ridge. Presently the cabin came into view, and he saw Pablo Gonzalez seated before the door and watching the forest languidly.

Juan must be guarded in his talk, he knew. He must not indicate by word or manner that anything unusual was in the wind. He greeted the guard politely.

"A strangely dry season, Pablo!" he added casually.

"Of the driest," agreed the other; "yet for three days now has the haze been gathering, Juan. We should have rain soon."

"God grant it!" returned the caller, and requested leave to use the telephone.

Receiving the guard's permission, he called Moore's station, and in a few words acquainted Quintana with the fact of his success. In reply, the Mexican ordered him to stay where he was, and promised to join him as soon as possible.

The Indian then emerged and seated himself on the ground by Pablo, prepared to undergo with what stoicism he possessed the ordeal of conversation with the guard.

Pablo had hired his eyesight to the government, but his tongue was his own. During the wait that ensued he indulged himself in talk—so Juan thought—intemper-

ately. The process was not without strain, in the circumstances; and the Indian heard the approaching horses of Quintana and the ranger with much relief. As he rose to greet them, he felt as if he had endured a penance.

Moore busied himself with instructing Pablo in the details of his new assignment. Quintana, motioning to Juan, led the way to the cabin, where he received the Indian's report of his reconnaissance. When the account was ended, he sat silent for a moment. It was plain from his expression that Juan's conduct of his mission had been eminently satisfactory.

"This valley of which you speak, and into which the hidden passage leads—you know it well?" he inquired presently.

"Assuredly, *señor*," replied Don Ramon's servant. "There, each month, is held the assembly at which all the faithful gather, entering one by one through the pass which is the single means of ingress. There is the chapel—the *morada*. There are the holy relics—the whips, the chariot of fire, the hide of a minor devil slain by one of the departed saints."

His companion's eyes shone.

"Is it indeed the council place of the band?"

Quintana masked his exultation quickly, for surprise appeared in the Indian's eyes. With his high office in the order, it seemed strange that the possessor of the symbol and the sign should be ignorant of the meeting place of the brethren. The chagrined agent endeavored to rectify his slip.

"Think not that I could not have learned this through proper channels, Juan," he said sternly. "My joy comes from the fact that the prisoners are confined there. At the meeting to-night—"

"Would it not be better, master," the other broke in anxiously, "to enter now, exert your authority, and secure the prisoners' release as speedily as possible?"

This was a poser. What the Indian proposed was the obvious course to pursue, had Ricardo been the illustrious personage he claimed to be.

Of course, if he had thought for a moment that Montoya contemplated killing Ramon or Claire without the sanction of the council, he would have acted in any event; but he did not think so. He felt sure the captives would be safe until a verdict was rendered against them by the forthcoming assembly. He was equally

certain that to attempt their rescue now—even were the attempt crowned with success—would reveal his hostility to Montoya's order, and would destroy at once and finally what chance he had to wring from guilty lips a confession of the killing of his friend Holt.

He could not explain this reasoning to Juan. He must temporize, obviously.

"There is a right way and a wrong way to conduct a matter of importance," he said with dignity. "For the time being the prisoners are well cared for, I make no doubt. When the council meets to-night, the question of their release will be raised. Trust me to have their safety on my conscience, Juan!"

He turned to the table that stood in a corner of the cabin, seized paper and pencil, and wrote quickly.

Juan stood awkwardly, with an abashed look.

"I would not have you think I doubt you, master," he said humbly. "I have seen the sign—"

"Your loyalty is without question," the other interrupted, without turning. "Send the Señor Moore hither, if you will."

When the ranger entered, Quintana handed him the note he had been writing.

"A message for Father Felipe," he said. "It must be carried to him without delay. Deliver it as you return, then go to your station and wait there for the posse from Santa Fe. Bring them with you to the cañon of the Gallinas. At the head of the cañon there is a hidden passage. On the right-hand side there is a blazed pine twelve paces from the cliff. Against the cliff itself there grows a bush, and behind the bush there is an opening that leads into the Hole in the Hills, where the Penitentes meet. Push in there and—well, round them up!"

Moore nodded.

"How many in the posse?"

"With the two men we've called over, and yourself, about fifteen, all told."

The ranger grinned.

"And there'll be a hundred of those crazy Indians inside. Some party, I'll predict!"

XIX

MOORE having started off on his errand, full of enthusiasm, his former fire guard and Juan set off on a scouting expedition while light lasted, for the day was waning fast. As they left the station, the agent

glanced at the high ridge to eastward, beyond which lay the hidden valley.

"You say cliffs surround the retreat of the brotherhood?" he inquired.

Juan nodded.

"On all sides, *señor*."

His companion indicated the mountain ahead.

"Could we climb that ridge yonder, work down the eastern slope to the rim, and from there see into the valley?"

"Sí, *señor*. It would take much effort, however. The hills rise high above the cliffs, and they are steep and brush-covered; yet it may be done!"

"We will do it!" Quintana declared briskly.

They crossed the intervening cañon and stood at the foot of the high ridge. Then began a long, back-breaking climb to the top. A brief rest here was followed by a descent even more arduous than the upward journey.

The slope, as they worked downward, grew constantly steeper. It was a jumble of loose bowlders and fallen trees, tangled with brushwood and creeping vines, impenetrable save to men inured to hardship and rough going. Here their ropes, taken along at Quintana's suggestion, came into play. They would lower themselves by a double strand hitched about a tree trunk. Then, when footing was found, they would release one end and pull the line after them. It seemed hours, though it was less, before they reached the rim, from which straight walls of rock dropped to the valley floor.

With a sigh of relief Quintana threw himself prone and peered over the edge of the precipice. The Hole in the Hills, he saw, was perhaps a quarter of a mile in length and two hundred yards at its greatest width. The Penitente *morada*, a hut of abode without exterior ornament, was visible at the lower end of the sunken valley. This end was flat and open, with the stream of the Gallinas flowing through it.

They had come out upon the rim above the upper part of the valley, which was rough with scattered pines and bushes. A little higher up, close to the cliff wall, stood a deserted log cabin, which had once belonged to the original owner of the claim—a trapper who had died many years ago, before the Penitentes had discovered the lost valley and made it theirs by right of occupation.

At sight of the shack, and of the man

seated on its threshold with a rifle across his knees, the watcher drew back hastily.

"There is Vincente Baca!" he exclaimed. "Juan, we have found the prison of our friends!"

The Indian cautiously looked over the edge of the cliff.

"It is even so, *señor*. Montoya said that Baca would be placed on guard." He added longingly: "If only we could reach them now!"

At this Quintana frowned. He could not very well tell Juan that one of his objects in bringing the Indian here was to set him a task that would occupy him till the meeting of the council was over. To insure Juan's absence—since he could not be trusted in that fanatic company—Ricardo must invent a reason other than the real one, and yet plausible, so that suspicion of his good faith might not enter his companion's mind.

"If we could reach them," he repeated slowly, "before Vincente took alarm and shot them both, they would be safe—for how long, Juan?"

"There is the passage below by which we might escape," the Indian began eagerly. "With Pedro alone on guard—"

He broke off at a smile and a gesture of his companion's. The sun was low, and deep shadows had crept across the sunken valley. A fire flared up suddenly in the cleared space before the *morada*. By its light figures were visible. Others joined them as the watchers gazed.

"Too late!" said Quintana. "The band assembles even now." He rose, preparing to leave. "I must start back, Juan. I shall go in with the others, as is my right, to fight for our friends' lives in the approaching council!"

Hope lit the Indian's face.

"You will enter the council, and proclaim your rightful rank and station?"

The agent nodded.

"Such is my plan. A penance shall be laid upon the chapter for this day's work. Moreover, the grip of Montoya must be broken—on that I am determined. I shall call the roll of his misdeeds and bring him to account."

"And I, master!" cried the other. "May I not be there to see?"

Quintana shook his head slowly, with an expression of regret.

"Would you leave the prisoners unwatched, save by Vincente? Your part is to remain here, to guard against foul play.

I fear Baca's treachery, once night falls." He unstrapped the carbine slung across his back, and gave it to the Indian. "Here is that which will lend you the strength of ten; but shoot only as a last resort, if the lives of our friends are in danger!"

He was gone, striking a slanting course up the mountainside. Juan watched him till he disappeared. Then the Indian threw himself full length on the ground, gazing intently at the armed figure below.

His was indeed a coign of vantage for a sharpshooter. It was not much more than a hundred yards to where the prisoners' guard sat. Secure from detection in the gathering dusk, Juan amused himself by sighting at the head of the unconscious Vincente. A gentle touch on the trigger, and Baca would pass to his reward!

Juan felt a strong temptation to test the sureness of his aim; but what gain in that, after all? The report of the gun would bring others running, and they would be apprised of a hostile presence. A stronger guard would be set—that would be all.

The fire at the lower end of the valley was blazing higher, and the crowd about it became larger every moment. They were silent as yet, but the silence seemed charged with a hidden meaning. In the fire's light Juan made out the figures of two men who strode toward the chapel. They unlocked the door and disappeared within. This would be Montoya, doubtless, and the acolyte who was to assist him in preparing for the coming ceremony. There could not be long to wait until the council convened.

But waiting was hard for Juan. Hitherto he had always joined in the rites, and it was almost intolerable to be deprived of the privilege on this night of all nights, when the life of his master hung in the balance. His heart swelled with the pangs of frustrated zeal. His fancy played raptly with the rôle he might have taken, were things different.

He was left here, he reflected, to see that Vincente Baca did not exceed his instructions and work harm to the prisoners on his own account. But what if Vincente were to be put out of the way without raising an alarm? What if, at the same time, Juan could find a means of ingress to the valley other than by the customary pass?

The thought, which hope straightway envisaged as a possibility, set his pulse pounding with excitement. He leaned far out over the edge of the cliff, striving, in the

gloom, to find some sign of possible foothold on its surface.

The drop, he judged, was all of three hundred feet. His two ropes, tied end to end, would not lower him more than one hundred. Yet he knew that many a cliff whose surface, from a little distance, appeared as smooth as glass, upon closer inspection showed workable irregularities. At least, he told himself, he could essay the descent. He could climb back up the rope, hand over hand, if he found no place for lodgment.

It was nearly dark now. The figure of Vincente was a featureless blur. Juan knew that against the background of trees he must be quite invisible from below. There was a late moon, but an hour or more of darkness remained before it would rise. It was now or never, he realized. He drew a deep breath on the resolve to test his theory forthwith.

He examined the ropes carefully, and tied them together with a secure knot. One end of the new line he fastened to a tree that grew near the rim. He slung the carbine on his back, removed his shoes, grasped the rope, and let himself gingerly over the edge of the precipice.

For a moment, as he swung there between heaven and earth, with the long drop below him, the Indian's courage shook; but the rope was stout, and he was as strong as a young bull. He took heart as he went down slowly, hand over hand, examining the rock wall as he descended. When he had lowered himself half the length of the line, he rested at the knot he had made, looping the rope about one leg.

Night had now fallen in earnest. Nearby objects were dimly visible in the starlight. He could still make out the outlines of the cabin below, but of Vincente he could distinguish nothing.

He noted that the Penitentes had formed in a semicircular body before the fire that they had lighted. Behind a rude altar stood the gaunt figure of Don Tomaso, motionless, with uplifted hands. The sound of chanting came softly on the wind.

Juan sighed and prepared to resume his slow descent; but as he moved he swung against the wall and felt the grateful pressure of a ledge against his legs. His heart jumped. He groped for the obstruction with one hand, and got his feet on the narrow shelf. He stood there for a moment, steadying himself by the rope. The ledge

seemed to run downward at a steep angle. There was nothing for it but to trust himself to the precarious path!

He drew his knife, cut the rope, and coiled the free half about his waist. Letting go his hold on the swinging end, he moved forward cautiously, step by step. How long he trod the hazardous trail he did not know; but finally the ledge came to an end in a deep fissure in the rocks. A glance downward told Juan that he had progressed more than halfway from the top.

By wedging his rope in the fissure and knotting it about a slab split from the main body of the rock, he found that he could anchor it, with probable safety. He could not see the dangling end, nor could he estimate how far from the ground it hung. Should he trust himself to its doubtful offices?

Best to chance it, he decided, having come thus far. With a muttered invocation he dropped off into space. The rope gave slightly, then held firm. Juan slithered downward rapidly, his hands burned by the strands that whistled through his fingers. He wrapped his legs about the line, and stopped with an effort. Looking down, he found that he had reached the end of the rope, but fifty feet or more still separated him from the ground.

He hung there wretchedly, owning himself beaten. He would have to retrace his way up the rope and along the ledge, and climb back to the top by the other line. Could he do it? He was tired now, and his hands were raw and bleeding. Was it not better to let go and drop, trusting to chance and his own tough frame to carry him through uninjured?

As he swung, undecided, the sudden shrill cry of a woman rent the air. Instantly the voice of Vincente Baca sounded, sharp and menacing.

At the same moment Juan felt the treacherous rope give suddenly. He felt himself hurtling through space. He felt a crash that shook every bone in his body—then, for a space, nothingness!

He could not have remained unconscious long, for when he recovered his senses the voices he had heard still sounded in his ears. He stretched his limbs gingerly. He was sound, though bruised, for a scrub oak at the bottom of the cliff had broken the full force of his fall. He gave quick thanks to the saints for such timely aid.

He glanced toward the cabin, whence the voices sounded. Vincente was backing away from the door, his rifle at the ready. Within the hut Juan suddenly descried Ramon de Vargas advancing slowly and waveringly. He was overjoyed to set eyes on his master. Don Ramon's wound could not be serious, he thought, if the prisoner could walk; but why did he walk toward Vincente, who plainly threatened him?

Ramon's eyes were wide and fixed, and he seemed to be moving in a dream. The voice of the *Americana* sounded, full of terror and excitement. She was pleading with Ramon to go no farther, and warning him of Vincente.

Juan stole steadily closer. They had not heard him as yet. They could not dream that he was near. He longed for his carbine, but it was useless, useless by his fall. In his teeth, however, was his long knife.

He crept forward on hands and knees. Vincente was on the point of firing. He raised the gun, his eyes dropped to the line of the sights. Ramon had reached the doorway.

"A step more," cried Baca, "and you die, Don Ramon!"

Juan was within five yards of the Penitente. He rose upright, grasping his long knife. His arm drew back and then shot forward. The knife clove the air.

Even as Claire Innes rushed forward and threw herself before Ramon, the keen point of the flying missile entered Vincente's back between the shoulders. His gun slipped from his hands. He fell forward on his face without a sound, and lay there in the high grass, motionless.

XX

THE face of Father Felipe grew thoughtful as he read the note that Moore delivered into his hands—the note in which Ricardo Quintana set forth the day's developments. The priest and Quintana must be allied, Moore surmised, against Montoya and his faction; though how that odd alliance had come about the ranger could not guess.

If any such association existed, however, Father Felipe gave no hint of it as he folded the paper that he had perused. His features retained their usual calm, and his eyes were absent in expression, as if he weighed some matter in his mind.

"I cannot say the news you bring is welcome," he said at length; "yet to be fore-

warned is much. My thanks for the prompt delivery of the message, *señor!*"

Moore, on the point of speaking, hesitated. There was much he wished to ask the other, but the moment seemed to be unpropitious.

"No answer was mentioned," he said. "In any case I shall not see our friend before the meeting to-night."

The priest's smile was grim.

"No answer is required, save the answer that action makes to the necessity set forth in the communication."

The ranger left. On his way home he stopped at the mission school, having determined to apprise Isabel Otero of Claire's predicament before she could learn the facts from other and perhaps less friendly lips.

To his surprise, she did not seem greatly distressed by the tidings. Her forebodings seemed to have discounted the facts.

"I feared disaster," she said, with serious eyes. "Now that which I feared has come to pass. If only poor Claire had listened to our warnings!"

Moore's gaze was kind. For some reason Isabel always roused in him the protective instinct of the male. She seemed to him curiously innocent of the realities of the world. She was a good girl, he would have said, according to her lights.

"Some folks won't take advice, Miss Isabel," he commented. "They've got to work things out for themselves—to learn what's what in this life by hard knocks. I reckon, after this, Miss Innes will think twice before she gets mixed up with a Mex—"

He stopped abruptly, his face flushing a dull red through its tan. He had forgotten, for the moment, that the girl before him was of the same race as Ramon.

Isabel's expression did not alter, but a somber look came into her eyes at his thoughtless speech.

"It is that Claire overlooked the circumstances of her position, and of Ramon's. His blood, I think, should be no bar to their happiness, were that all."

"I reckon you're right," agreed the ranger impulsively. "Anyhow, I'll say this much—I never ran across a girl I liked as much as you, even if you ain't American! You and me are friends, aren't we, Miss Isabel?"

Her eyes fell before the ranger's frankly admiring gaze.

"I am honored, *señor!*" she murmured.

"But Claire—can nothing be done to help her?"

He hesitated.

"I wouldn't worry overly much about her, if I were you," he said. "She's got friends who are doing what they can for her. She's safe till after the meeting to-night, I reckon; and then—"

He paused, loath to reveal even to Isabel the preparations they had made to trap the Penitentes, and the coming of the posse from Santa Fe. It was well for his plans that caution controlled him, for Dolores, passing the door of the room, had heard and recognized his voice, and had stopped just out of sight, listening intently.

She heard Isabel Otero sigh and say despondently:

"My hopes are small, *señor*, for Claire's safety. The society of the brethren is all-powerful in Truchas. Her fate, I fear, is linked now with Ramon's—and he, alas, is surely doomed! If only she had not allowed her passion for Ramon to overcome her judgment!"

Moore's face had a dubious look.

"You think she's as strong as all that for Don Ramon?"

Isabel nodded.

"At first I did not think so, but now—well, only yesterday, *señor*, she pledged her word to Father Felipe that she would avoid Ramon for a time. You say that to-day she was in his company, and was surprised by Don Tomaso and his companions. What can one think but that she loves him?"

The ranger looked thoughtful.

"Maybe you're right—"

He broke off, staring suspiciously at the door, which had creaked suddenly. He rose and reached it in three strides. The hall was empty. He returned to his chair with a sheepish look.

"Thought I heard something out yonder," he said; "but I guess I must have been mistaken."

Had he glanced behind the door, which opened outward, he would have found that his ears had not deceived him. Flat against the wall, Dolores stood behind the door, motionless, till the interrupted conversation in the room had been resumed.

As the voices sounded once more, she slipped from her hiding place and vanished down the corridor. Catching up her shawl, she stole from the house by the rear door and hurried home, seeking her father.

She had known that Montoya intended to take Ramon and the *Americana* together, if opportunity offered, and to hold them until the verdict of the council had been given—against them, as he hoped. In that case they would be where he could produce them instantly and make sure that whatever penalty might be ordained was carried out on the spot, while the minds of the brethren were still inflamed. If, unexpectedly, a decision should be given in their favor—well, they would still be in Don Tomaso's power!

The fact that Dolores had learned of the compact made by Claire and the priest was responsible for Montoya's hasty move, for it warned him that his intrigue was known, at least to Father Felipe. Hence the prompt kidnaping of Ramon de Vargas and the girl, and the calling of the council for that night; hence, also, the careful selection of those bidden to attend. The single feature of the program changed in execution was the shooting of Ramon, instead of his capture unharmed, as had been planned.

Montoya had fired on impulse, when he saw his hated foe helpless through the sights of his rifle. As it turned out, however, he concluded that this way was as good as another to advance his general purpose. It had the merit of avoiding what might otherwise have proved a hard and sanguinary struggle. The young man was not mortally wounded, and in any event he would survive until the trial had been held. On the whole, Don Tomaso felt well pleased with the way events were moving.

He had returned from the cabin where he had left the prisoners, and was resting in his study, planning the details of the night's projected work, when his daughter entered.

"What you have done is known, father!" she announced breathlessly. "Juan, the servant of Don Ramon, has followed your trail, even to the valley of the councils!"

Montoya's brow grew black.

"What ill-omened news is this?" he demanded thickly.

Briefly Dolores repeated the gist of what she had overheard. Moore, fortunately, had named no names, except Juan's, of those not already implicated, and had told nothing but that the captives' whereabouts had been discovered, and that it was known the meeting of the order was to be held that same night, instead of later. Yet this was quite enough for Montoya.

He leaped from his seat and strode, raging, up and down the room.

"Doubtless the prying Indian has by now borne word of the gathering of the society to the priest," he snarled. "The ranger also knows of our plans; but—how many more?"

The quick wits of Dolores had already been busy.

"Had he told all in Truchas inimical to us, father," she observed calmly, "what would they gain thereby?"

The Penitente stared.

"Time works for us," she went on. "No opposition that you need fear can be organized before the meeting to-night. It is obvious, from what the ranger said, that they have no idea of trying to free the prisoners before then. They deem them safe, for the time being, and—"

"A thought lies there!" broke in her father. "Why should I not visit the prisoners even yet, and make sure of our just vengeance?"

"It is to avoid that very thing—your sole responsibility for their destruction—that we have been working. Would you spoil all now? No! Go before the council, as planned, and get the support of the order for what you design. Then can you rest assured of safety in the outcome."

"And if the priest should appear in the assembly, and should plead for the lives of the condemned?"

"That risk you must be prepared to take. If the priest, or any other enemy, should appear, you must welcome them. That very thing will unmask them. It lies with you whether, once there, they may depart as easily!"

Montoya suddenly stopped pacing. His stare grew fixed. As the argument of the girl registered in his mind, he nodded with slow satisfaction.

"There is pith in your words, my daughter. At the council I shall know at last who are for me and who against me. Let the strongest win!"

He paused, frowning reflectively. Suddenly, at a thought, his lip curled with contempt.

"I had forgotten—a minor point, but interesting. The woman would have fled with Ramon de Vargas as his mistress. He repulsed her, for she confessed that she was already wedded. Who would have said that even that remnant of piety remained to him?"

Dolores started sharply at her father's words. Her eyes darkened and became fathomless. Her lips scarcely moved as she whispered:

"Married! The *Americana* married! And Ramon repulsed her!"

Montoya did not observe the girl's sudden change of mood. He was preparing to leave. The light guard he had left in the valley was the cause of a growing anxiety.

"De Vargas would cast her off, doubtless—as he did you," he muttered hastily. "We took them together in good time!" He moved to the door. "Wish me good fortune, daughter!"

Dolores did not answer. She sat immovable, while the dusk drew slowly down, while night fell and stars appeared.

Hours passed. Tumult was within her, for all that outwardly she seemed cold and still. Something which she had once called love, but which she thought had died, was fighting to regain a lodgment in her heart. She tried to crush it. She told herself that revenge was sweeter than that struggling emotion which fought on so fiercely. Her father's words rang in her brain—the American woman was married—Ramon had repulsed her!

Dolores bowed her head in her hands, murmuring scraps of prayer for the first time in days—for the first time since her love had died. But was it dead? Tears crept between the fingers of her clasped hands. Her shoulders heaved slowly; sobs came. Love had been dead, but it was reborn now!

A loud knock at the outer door roused her. She rose quickly, brushed a hand over her eyes, and answered the peremptory summons. On the door sill stood a man in the prime of life, ill clad, but with a proud mien and dark, imperious eyes.

"Don Tomaso Montoya?" he demanded curtly.

Something in his face, in his burning eyes, impressed Dolores strangely.

"My father is absent from home," she began, and shrank back at a swift sign the stranger made. She bent low before him, with awe in her eyes. "Enter, master!" she said reverently.

The other shook his head.

"I have traveled far to see Montoya. My errand is urgent. I must know his whereabouts at once!"

The girl hesitated for a breath, and then said quickly:

"A moment, eminence! I go to fetch horses for the trip. I myself will guide you to my father."

XXI

By devious routes the brethren of the cross came to the hidden valley—afoot, for the most part, and as silently as lovers stealing to a secret rendezvous. One by one, like shadows of the night, they flitted up the cañon of the Gallinas and disappeared behind the clump of bushes that masked the way into the Penitente stronghold.

Among them moved the man known as Ricardo Quintana. He reached the screen of brush and entered the narrow passage through the cliff on the heels of the cloaked member before him. It was pitch dark here, and he went slowly, keeping his course by a hand on the smooth wall at his side. He emerged at length, whispered the password—"San Ildefonso!"—to Pedro Lopez at the tunnel's mouth, and then, with a sigh of relief at his successful entry, mingled quickly with the throng inside.

The *morada* stood at his right hand, on rising ground, fifty yards or more from the little creek that bisected the valley. Across the stream, on a flat-topped knoll, was a row of wooden crosses, which faced the chapel. Perhaps ten yards from the latter, before a rude altar raised for the occasion, was the fire that Juan and his companion had seen from the rim above. It was larger now; men were feeding it from a huge pile of piñon and juniper wood at one side.

For the most part the brethren were grouped between the fire and the creek bed. No one spoke. It was the custom that no greeting could be passed, no recognition of another granted, between the hour of setting out for the assembly and the holding of the Penitente rites.

Quintana, lurking in the background well out of the direct play of firelight, felt reason to be grateful for this inviolable rule of taciturnity. That he was an intruder he knew well. How short his term would be, were his deception to become known to the grim fanatics surrounding him, he suspected with a disturbing sense of certainty.

The fact that Don Tomaso had not included him in the list of those summoned to the council might mean much or little. It might mean merely that Montoya had not been able to send him word of the hastily called assembly. If, on the other hand, the Penitente leader had penetrated his dis-

guise, he was done for. He had walked into a trap. Time only, he reflected philosophically, would tell which of these alternatives was in accord with fact.

He was aware of a sudden movement in the crowd. A hoarse voice within the dark *morada* raised a mournful chant. The brethren lent their voices to the strain, and the cliffs sent back a weird response.

From the doorway of the chapel stepped Montoya, clad in black robes, holding before him in one hand a crucifix and in the other a skull. Behind him walked an acolyte carrying a tall lighted candle and a leather-thonged whip.

The assistant placed the candle on the altar, the skull and cross likewise. Then he stepped aside, the whip still in his custody. Montoya stood motionless, his face stern and impassive. His arms went out suddenly, and the chant died. His harsh voice rose in the immemorial phrases of the service.

The ritual, Quintana noted, was essentially grotesque—a travesty on that of the true church; yet its setting made it impressive. As the sonorous phrases rang out, with the deep antiphonal murmur of the crowd for a booming counterpoint, despite himself the intruder felt something of the excitement that animated the gathering. He had a vague sense of unseen presences, and felt the influence of superstitious hopes and fears. Faith in the vagrant yearnings of the untutored soul seemed natural and logical. He shook himself impatiently, to rid his mind of the cloud that settled down upon it like a warm mist.

At length the ritual ended. The ranks of the brethren were charged with strong emotion; they were ripe for some fanatical orgy. It was the moment for which Montoya waited. His the privilege to direct for good or evil the force called into being.

He paused, gathering in careful hands the reins of eloquence. As he stood thus, marshaling his thoughts, above the eastern ridge the moon slipped into sight. A wan radiance flooded the valley, contending mildly, but with a slow insistence, against the red flare of the fire. Dim forms of men were silvered. Streams of light filtered through obstructing trees and formed pools of light upon the valley's floor.

To northward the dark bulk of Truchas Peak leaped from obscurity and stood bathed in a white glamour. The cross on its face seemed to be hanging miraculously

in mid-air. A subdued murmur ran through the throng. With one accord heads turned toward the symbol—their talisman for comfort and protection while the stone peak endured.

Montoya, quick to bend the omen to his purpose, cried loudly:

"A portent, brethren! The holy emblem of our order is revealed to us at a fitting moment, to confirm and sanctify the judgment we are gathered here to render!"

The murmur of the crowd took on volume, and deepened to a roar. All eyes centered on Montoya, who stood with arms outstretched, judging the temper of his followers.

They had, he saw, caught the underlying meaning of his words. Rumor had been busy, in Truchas, and it was known that in the council charges would be brought against Ramon de Vargas. Don Tomaso and his henchmen had sown their seed well, and the minds of the brethren were prepared. Their passions were dangerously roused. The time to act had come.

Silence fell at the chief's peremptory gesture.

"The cross has blessed our band—we have prospered! Yet only as we accept the lesson of the cross, and observe the rules laid down by the founders of our order, may we hope for a continuance of protection!"

He paused, to resume in a stern tone:

"None of us is free from sin—that we admit freely. Where the offense is flagrant, it is the part of our council to judge the act and assign to the transgressor the ordeal for its expiation. Thus often in times past—thus recently in the case of our brother, José Candelario!"

His glance rested for a moment on the youth mentioned, who was prominent in the front rank of the crowd.

"Did the penalty ordained bring fruit of repentance, José?" he asked somberly.

"Aye, of a truth!" asseverated the self-conscious youth. "Much peace has my soul gained thereby!"

"Inevitably," commented Montoya. He glanced piercingly about, his brows knitting in a frown. "But when the sinner is not a member of our order, where lies our duty then?"

This was a direct reference to Ramon de Vargas, and was accepted as such. Conflicting cries arose, diverse views were voiced.

Candelario spoke out clearly:

"All men are kin—linked in one company by the sad consequences of misdoing. It ill befits us, the guardians of truth, to grudge the means of salvation to an erring brother, even though he be not a member of our band!"

"That is my view also," said Montoya quickly. "It is of Don Ramon de Vargas I speak—a youth formerly of good repute, though lacking, it may be, in proper piety. Of late, as you know, he has fallen into ways of lust and wickedness. I need not recapitulate the facts—they are of common knowledge. That an intrigue so open and audacious should thrive in our midst is inconceivable; yet is it so. Shall it be permitted to continue? Shall the affront to our code be longer countenanced? Must a lost soul be charged to our account by reason of our negligence? Or shall we assume the duty that is plainly ours—the duty of disciplining this erring brother, and reclaiming him for the high community of holiness?"

A roar greeted the hoarse crescendo of Don Tomaso's peroration. Hands waved, eyes gleamed wildly in the moonlight, voices shrilled out above the general uproar.

"The offense is great—let the penance be adequate!"

"Save the soul of Don Ramon, even in his own despite!"

"Let a just judgment be passed on the libertine!"

Satisfaction showed in Montoya's face. He had not misjudged his influence over the minds of his followers.

"There is no question but that we should recognize the strong obligation that rests upon us in this instance. The young man, though blinded to the benefits of our society, is one whom we have known since boyhood—truly a son of Truchas. Surely we cannot stand idly by and see him sunk in mortal sin! We must lend a helping hand, and snatch him from the pit. It remains only to determine the nature of the atonement he must make."

Don Tomaso ceased suddenly, his eyes narrowing. A man—a priestly and venerable figure—had emerged from the crowd and stepped into the open space between the people and the altar. There he stood for a moment with bent head, as if in prayer.

Quintana, on the point of intervening, relaxed thankfully. He had counted on the

aid of Father Felipe, and the priest had not disappointed him!

"What do you do here, *padre*?" cried Montoya wrathfully.

The old man raised his head and fixed grave eyes on the leader of the Penitentes.

"My errand is soon told—I would save you and your minions from the crime of blasphemy. Is it permitted one who wishes only well for you all to say a word in this matter, before judgment has been made irrevocable?"

Montoya hesitated. Had he dared, he would have refused the priest's plea; but he did not dare. Father Felipe's hold on all in Truchas was strong, and already the curiosity of the crowd was aroused. They would learn why the priest had taken this unprecedented step—why he had come, uninvited, into the Penitente council, from whose meetings he had hitherto held aloof, and whose judgments he had more than once condemned.

"I know not," said Don Tomaso, "how you, who have long been an avowed enemy of our order, have gained entrance here tonight. Since you have, however, speak out, father!"

The priest turned to the crowd, his eyes earnest.

"I take the charges against Ramon de Vargas as amply proven," he began; "for well I know that not by hearsay alone would you condemn one whom you have hitherto regarded as a friend and patron."

Montoya broke in roughly:

"The facts are undeniable. I myself attest their truth!"

The priest bowed.

"So be it. I ask no more than that Don Tomaso vouch for the youth's sin. This being granted, what atonement for so heinous a thing but death? What less penance can wipe away the stain of this extreme transgression?"

Montoya's eyes opened in surprise. Whither led this unexpected trail?

"It is the penalty I myself would urge," he admitted. "The youth has sinned knowingly, with open eyes. His partner is a gringo woman—a wife by her own confession. There is no sign of repentance on the part of either. It is a gross scandal, of which all in Truchas know. The example is outstanding and vicious in its probable effect."

The priest's eyes flashed, his voice rang out indignantly,

"You would kill the youth, then?" he asked.

"Aye—him and his partner in the crime—together!" replied Montoya. "The manner of their death, in my view, is all that need concern us now."

"Have you no concern, then," cried Father Felipe, "for the effect of such a deed upon the good name of the order—upon the prestige of Holy Church, within whose bosom you have been nourished? Suppose Don Ramon and the woman slain—with all justification, if you will—think you the Penitentes can escape the indictment of encompassing their death? Will not the friends of the condemned move in the matter? Will not the law of the *Americanos* have its say? Does not the obvious danger to the society and to the church concern you?"

Montoya smiled disdainfully. His eyes flickered about over the throng.

"The priest," he said with a contemptuous shrug, "is fearful of fancied consequences. He is unfamiliar, it is apparent, with the methods of our order. He knows nothing of the secrecy with which we work, of the vows of silence we have sworn. How can he, who is not a member of our dread fraternity—"

"Yet one is present," broke in the priest surprisingly, "who is all that I am not, yet who will warn you, even as I do, of the peril of your course!"

He pointed with outstretched arm. Through the crowd pushed a broad-shouldered young man who ranged himself beside the priest. In silence Ricardo Quintana turned and faced the brethren of the cross.

XXII

THERE was a moment's hush—a hush of amazement. Many of those present knew the youth who faced them for Ricardo Quintana, but to none save Montoya had he made known his membership in the order of the Penitentes. How, the rest wondered, had he won an entry to the valley, to appear thus spectacularly before them, vouched for by the priest?

He seemed thoroughly at ease. His face was calm and uneager, his eyes glinted in the firelight as they ranged over the assembly; but though his courage held, he was not without apprehension. He realized that the crisis of his desperate undertaking was at hand, that the next few min-

utes would decide whether he or Montoya would prove victor in the high stakes for which they played.

It is true that Father Felipe held a trump card in reserve—the sentence of excommunication; but this the priest was loath to use save in direst extremity. It had been agreed between the two that on Quintana would rest the task of convincing the brethren of his authority, did the priest's first effort fail. It was a case, essentially, of rival personalities struggling to control the crowd—with Montoya taking the first trick.

The youth broke silence abruptly, speaking not in his customary husky whisper, but in a clear, carrying tone:

"I come, brothers, from the parent chapter in Mexico. Far have I traveled that I might be with you on this occasion. On my arrival I showed credentials of membership to Don Tomaso; and yet I was not notified of the place and hour of this meeting. I was not invited to attend, as courtesy would dictate, as my fraternal right would urge!"

He turned swiftly on the Penitente leader.

"Is there a reason hidden from us, *señor*, to explain this seeming incivility?"

Rage had succeeded wonder on the face of Montoya. He had purposely omitted the intruder's name from the number of those summoned to the council. It was not that he had thought the man actually dangerous. Hitherto Don Tomaso had held for him a secret contempt—a feeling not lessened by Quintana's stupid failure in the matter of waylaying Ramon de Vargas. It was rather that he had decided, in the circumstances, to limit the assembly to those known to him to be of proven and thoroughgoing loyalty.

Now he wished fervently that he had put the snake out of the way while it was still feasible to do so. The whole character of the younger man had altered. He seemed cool and purposeful, confident and poised. Montoya himself had been the dupe—deceived by an enemy whose astuteness he had fatuously underestimated!

The knowledge maddened the Penitente, but caution quickly prevailed.

"The credentials appeared genuine," he muttered; "yet who knows? Much care must be exercised in the admission of strangers to our ranks. I have sent letters by a trusty hand to our head, in Mexico, regarding the matter, and a reply should

soon be forthcoming. In the meantime let us not forget that we have assembled, not to foster dissension, but to render judgment in the affair you know of—"

Quintana broke in resolutely:

"It is of that matter I would speak."

He paused. When he resumed, it was with a new air of authority. "Experience has taught us of the parent branch that wisdom lies in disciplining only those who have taken vows of obedience to the order. The arm of the secular law is long, and to come into conflict with it is to jeopardize the interests of the society. There is also the church to be considered. Father Felipe is right—to kill Ramon de Vargas lies not within our jurisdiction. To kill the young *Americana* would be madness."

"Have done!" cried Montoya furiously. "How it is in Mexico I know not, but here"—he caught himself, paused uncertainly, and then yielded to the impulse of his rage—"here the order makes its own laws and renders its own judgments. It has been so in times past—it will be so while the great cross of Truchas endures!"

A gleam of eagerness showed in the eyes of the pretended Mexican.

"But are you so daring where those of American blood are involved, such as the Señorita Innes, for example? Or do you act thus fearlessly only when the condemned are of the lesser Spanish strain?"

At the bold taunt a growl went through the listeners. Montoya's face flushed darkly.

"Had our brother been with us two seasons ago, he would have known of the destruction of a gringo—a youth whose boast it was that he would probe the secrets of our society!"

Quintana smiled sardonically.

"I have heard rumors of the incident. So you would claim credit for the killing of the Señor Holt?"

At another time his insolent skepticism might have roused Montoya's suspicions, but the Penitente's passion obscured his better judgment.

"This arm struck the knave down!" he cried, beside himself. "Vicente Baca helped me to bind him! Those who carried him to the mesa, and left him to perish miserably there, stand here to-night, witnesses to the truth of my words!"

He stopped, chilled by the sudden knowledge of what his admission meant—by the significantly intent look of the man oppos-

ing him; but the wild acclaim of his followers speedily heartened him. With the chapter on his side, he knew, his enemies were impotent; and those enemies, he promised himself grimly, would be silenced effectually ere the meeting adjourned.

But what was this look of triumph on the face of Quintana? Whence came the consciousness of power that marked his features, the resonance that filled his voice, as he turned to the clamorous throng and stilled their shouting with a gesture?

Again the commanding gesture—and, as Montoya saw it, his knees failed him and the roots of his hair stirred. His eyes grew wide with fear as the stranger drew from his breast and held on high a small cross of white stone, which gleamed red as the firelight fell upon it.

"To your knees!" cried the dark youth in stentorian tones.

The brethren, with a sigh that rustled through the throng like wind through dry weeds, abased themselves one and all. Montoya sank to his knees. Only Father Felipe, crossing himself gravely, remained upright beside the holder of the symbol.

The latter spoke, in a slow, solemn tone that drove each word home:

"You do well, friends, to render homage to this holy token of our order, the badge and emblem of my authority! Yes—I, whom you know as Ricardo Quintana, am here as an envoy from the supreme head of the Penitentes. For weeks have I dwelt among you in the humble guise of a stranger, striving to learn the truth of the reports that reached us, in Mexico, as to the conduct of the Truchas chapter—rumors of decadence, of a spineless acceptance of the will of your local leader, of crimes committed in the name of the society to further the interests of a single man, whose overweening arrogance has at last overreached itself."

A moan went through the prostrate ranks. Muttered supplications could be heard—prayers for forbearance.

"As to the internal conduct of your affairs," went on the young man, "that might be forgiven; but deeds such as the killing of the stranger, Señor Holt, which Montoya has just confessed—such crimes, reacting on the good name of the order throughout the land, are difficult to overlook!"

"Pardon, eminence," muttered Don Tomaso, "but the stranger would have spied out the secrets of the chapter—"

"And were those secrets harder to preserve unrevealed than the shocking fact of the man's murder?"

The fickle crowd stirred ominously, casting on their trembling leader looks of enmity.

"Don Tomaso, of a truth, instigated the act!" cried one.

"It is his hatred of Don Ramon which moves him in the present matter!" added another.

"Tell us, master, how best to repair our former errors!"

The Mexican waited for the cries to cease.

"The policy laid down is strictness of discipline within the body of the order, and lenience outside of it," he resumed. "We cannot fight the law and the government. We cannot contend on equal terms with the church. We must recognize the hostility that we incur by reason of such acts as the one that we have mentioned. Here, in the Truchas chapter, you have been badly led. The chapter must be purged. A penance will be imposed—but of that later. Now we must decide on the handling of the case that is before the council—the case of Don Ramon de Vargas and the *Americana*, the Señorita Innes."

At once voices rose advocating mercy and discretion. Let the woman run her evil course—it was no concern of the brethren! Let the youth persist in his perverse infatuation—God would doubtless deal with him in His own time! Let not the welfare of the society be jeopardized—that above all!

Quintana raised a hand for silence. When the tumult died, he bent a stern glance on Montoya and said accusingly:

"The youth and the maiden must not be molested, but what shall be done with this false leader, who puts his own desires above the welfare of the order he is sworn to cherish? Nay, you know not all the depth of his guile. Appealing to you for judgment on the twain, he has seen fit, before judgment was rendered, to attack them without warning, to wound Don Ramon grievously, to take both captive, and to hide them—where, think you, brethren?"

As Quintana paused for his effect, casting a glance over the scowling ranks before him, he was seen to start suddenly and move back a step. His face, flushed with triumph, paled. A look of consternation appeared in his eyes, to be succeeded in-

stantly by a gleam of caution, by a forced smile.

Unseen of any, two figures had crept warily from the rocky pass at the outlet of the gorge, and had paused on the outskirts of the throng, where they stood for a moment, listening to the pretended envoy's harangue. Then they worked unostentatiously forward.

At the moment when the orator's eye fell upon them, the taller of the two newcomers, who had a serape thrown over his head and shoulders, was in the act of stepping forth from the crowd into the cleared space before the altar. There he stopped, facing the dismayed Quintana. He stretched forth a lean, arresting arm. His voice shook with wrath as he cried:

"Brothers, that man is an impostor! Seize him!"

XXIII

THE appearance of the irate stranger at the moment when Quintana's triumph seemed assured came upon the latter as an unforeseen and undeserved misfortune. Thus far, he flattered himself, he had played his cards with skill and intrepidity; but he was under no illusions concerning the precariousness of his hold on the mob before him. They had swung his way for the moment, impressed by the talisman he bore, and by the surprise of his claim to high rank in the hierarchy of the order; but they would renounce that hasty allegiance, he knew, as quickly as they had assumed it, were reasons given them.

It was a question, now, whose word they would take—his own or his accuser's. Much would depend on the way in which he met the charge leveled against him. With a vigorous effort, therefore, the young man strove to regain his air of assurance.

"Words avail nothing," he declared boldly, "lacking the sustaining strength of fact. Will any here deny the efficacy of the symbol that I bear?"

The stranger made no spoken reply, but threw back the serape from his features in plain view of the crowd. The red light of the fire brought out the stern lines of that forbidding visage.

Quintana stared at the man's face with a sinking heart. Well he remembered the hawklike nose, the lean and cruel jaw, the hard, imperious eyes. It needed not the joyful exclamation of Montoya, the awed

murmur from the watching throng, to tell the government agent that his house of cards had fallen. The face on which he gazed was the face of Emilio de Gama, right-hand man to the head of the Penitentes, and a personage familiar to the members of well-nigh every chapter in the order.

That he was known to the brethren of Truchas was made manifest by the shout that went up from a hundred throats.

"De Gama! De Gama! It is he assuredly!"

The representative of the head did not unbend as the clamor rolled and beat about him. His face was expressionless, his eyes remained intently fixed on the young man before him.

"Seize the impostor!" he ordered for the second time.

Fury took the exposed masquerader. He saw death in the eyes blazing into his. Well, he would not die alone! His hand slipped to his breast, and closed about the gun nestling in its shoulder holster.

At the same moment, however, Montoya seized him from the rear, pinioning his arms. Men dashed from the crowd and threw themselves upon him. In a trice he was overcome, disarmed, and tied hand and foot.

De Gama had stepped quickly forward and snatched the emblem of white stone from the other's grasp. He kissed it reverently in the sight of all. Then he held it on high, facing the towering peak that rose to the northward.

"Long shall this night be noteworthy!" he cried. "In the shadow of the cross has the sacred symbol been redeemed! The protection of the Most High still rests upon us, and upon our holy order!"

His eyes moved sidewise to the priest, Father Felipe, who had watched events in silence and with meditative eyes. De Gama said softly:

"Will you not now acknowledge, father, the validity of our claim to order this affair as seems good to us? Is it not an omen that success crowns our struggle against hostile influences? Will you not join us in the forthcoming ceremonies and bless our evening's work?"

The priest frowned. De Gama's voice held a veiled threat, which Father Felipe was not slow to catch. Had he consulted his impulse at the moment, he would have cursed rather than blessed the other's mur-

derous activities; but this, in the present temper of the gathering, he knew would be madness. He realized that even sentence of excommunication, his last weapon, would be futile against the fanatical zeal rekindled by the appearance of the Mexican dignitary. He must bide his time, he decided, and hope for a later opportunity to intervene with better chances of persuasion or coercion.

"Little power have I to stay your hand, Emilio de Gama," he said somberly. "Yet," he added, pointing to the sky, "God watches yonder! Have a care how you tempt His avenging wrath!"

An ironic smile touched the thin lips of the Penitente. Then, with a sudden frown, he turned to his prisoner, who lay glaring at him from the ground. He spurned Quintana with his foot.

"What shall be done with this dog, brothers?" he cried loudly. "How shall we punish this traitor, this renegade, this vile blasphemer?"

"Death to the carrion!" shouted one.

"Let him feel the whip!" suggested another.

"Torture would not come amiss!" cried a third.

The emissary from the head of the order gazed grimly on the throng.

"First I would tell you somewhat of his crime!" He paused, flicking the bound youth with a look of hate. "He is known to me—oh, yes, he is well known to me! Not three years ago he joined our order, for his own ends. He rose rapidly in the parent chapter, and won the confidence of our former chief, now gone to his reward in heaven. Little need to detail here the intrigue by which this young traitor involved the society in affairs properly belonging to the realm of politics, or the difficulty with which we of the opposing faction defended the society's existence against its many enemies. Suffice to say that with the death of the old head, and the election of the new, the dog's double dealing was disclosed at last. He was arrested and condemned to death. He escaped, taking in revenge the sacred symbol which he has since carried, despite our efforts to recover it and to destroy the thief. Not till we received the recent letter of Don Tomaso giving a description of the man calling himself Quintana did we dream of his whereabouts; but with the arrival of the message, we recognized the malefactor. I came,

hither forthwith, making what speed I might. God be thanked, brethren, that I have come in time!"

The assembly gasped at this revelation of treachery, and a shout arose for the blood of the transgressor. His crime was signal—let him no longer escape the death he merited!

The subject of the discussion strained at his bonds, his face bitter. He was helpless, trussed like a fowl, bursting with humiliation and chagrin. He surmised that Father Felipe, with the best will in the world, could do nothing further to aid him. Moore and his rangers would not arrive before daybreak, at the earliest. By that time, the captive fully believed, he would be food for crows. Hope left him; he was checkmated.

Under cover of the uproar Montoya had approached Emilio de Gama, and was speaking to him urgently. Don Tomaso's arm moved in the direction of the cabin where Claire and Ramon had been placed.

A new pang assailed the watching Quintana. Not only, he recalled, was his own life endangered by the failure of his plans, but Miss Innes, too, was in deadly peril. None save himself knew the anguish that that thought produced.

The Penitente from Mexico was commanding silence.

"Brethren!" he cried, when he could make his voice heard above the babel. "There is news for your ears. With commendable prevision Don Tomaso has taken prisoner Ramon de Vargas and his accomplice in sin, and even now they lie under guard at the hut near the head of the valley. Let them be brought straightway before the bar of judgment!"

"José Candelario," directed Montoya, "Diego Mendoza, Eduardo Luna! Bring hither the prisoners!"

The three chosen for the task started toward the hut, but stopped in their tracks ere they were well away from the crowd. From the night emerged two figures that halted at the edge of the zone touched by firelight. A mutter of amazement came from the throng—it was Juan, the Indian servant of Don Ramon, with his young master leaning against his shoulder!

Ramon, summoning all his strength, straightened and stood forth alone. His face was pale and proud, and no sign of weakness or fear marked his features.

"You need not send for me, friends," he

said in a firm tone. "I am come of my own will to suffer penance for my sin!"

There was a moment's hush. No one moved or spoke. On Montoya's face lay a curiously baffled look, as if hate had somehow been cheated of its due.

De Gama, his eyes narrowing, whispered to Father Felipe:

"See now, *padre*, the compelling power of our order to draw sinners to its bosom!"

The priest did not even hear the envoy's words. He was staring at Ramon incredulously. Anxiety was in his deep-set eyes, and lines about his tight lips betrayed pain.

The young man was speaking once more, laboriously, as if the effort wearied him:

"I confess my sin—I proclaim it abroad! It is not the sin with which I have been charged—the sin of dalliance with the Señora Innes. I speak of a more subtle evil—the sin of profane desire, the sin of black disloyalty to love!"

His words rang strangely in the ears of his astonished audience; but his eyes were on Montoya, who scowled back wrathfully.

"I loved the Señorita Dolores Montoya," went on the youth. "I have loved her for years—ever since we were children together. Recently I asked the maiden's hand of Don Tomaso, who refused the boon for reasons that seemed good to him."

"Well that I did!" broke in the gaunt Penitente. "Well that I did, since your depravity has revealed itself to all!"

"Depravity? Yes—and wickedness; yet I know not even now how it came about. It was a madness that came on me—by the influence of the Evil One, perhaps. I was wroth that my union with Dolores should be barred. I deemed her love faint that she would not defy you, Montoya, and the customs of our race. Now I see that it was my own love which could not stand the test—which was overborne by vanity and wounded pride. Then the Señorita Innes came, a solace for my disappointment. I thought her beautiful. I was beside myself, bewitched! I forgot Dolores—I forgot my love, my pledged honor! It was only to-day, when the *Americana* revealed the fact that she was already a wife, that the scales fell from my eyes. Then I saw clearly the enormity of my actions, the base treachery that was mine. Now I repent of my sin and confess it before you. I would make fitting atonement and receive absolution ere my soul flies to God."

Father Felipe broke the ensuing silence. His voice was hoarse with emotion, his arms were outstretched pleadingly:

"Ramon, Ramon! It is the office of the church to receive this confession that you would make—the office of her priest to impose penance and grant absolution! Will you forsake the church now in your extremity? Will you deny her primacy in matters spiritual?"

The youth shook his head slowly.

"The church will not meet my need now, father! Can I mumble Aves, or perchance fast for a brief time, and be healed of the sore that festers at my heart? How will such mild penance compare with the bitter anguish I have brought upon the Señorita Dolores? No, in my case only the stricter code of the brethren of the cross is adequate. I would feel the whip searing my flesh, the iron in my soul. I would suffer the extreme agony of crucifixion, as the Master did. Then, and not till then, shall I know peace."

De Gama was eying the priest exultantly. He wished no open quarrel with the church or any of its ministers, if it could be avoid-

ed. Ramon's unexpected stand, therefore, relieved him greatly, for the torture of a willing convert was more easily justified to the outer world than the killing of a non-communicant. Moreover, it tied the priest's hands, for now his protest—so far as the case of Ramon went—was with the youth, not with the Penitentes.

The envoy turned to Don Ramon and cried loudly:

"Your urgent need shall be met, brother! None call upon the brethren of the cross in vain!"

Ramon swayed with the words, his strength ebbing quickly. Juan sprang to support him, but ere he reached his master's side a slender, cloaked Penitente darted from the crowd and placed an arm about the young man's waist. The face of Dolores Montoya, aglow with love, appeared before his eyes; her whisper sounded in his ear:

"I will save you, Ramon—even from the madness that your wound has brought upon you! You have sinned against none, except it be myself, and I forgive you freely. I will save you, Ramon!"

(To be concluded in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

NATURE WITHOUT HER

THE day is clouding—she will not come!
The mountains gloom and the woods are dumb,
The little river forgets to sing,
And the heart has gone out of everything;
And from this I learn what I always knew—
That the beauty of the world is—you!

In vain is all the summer's gold,
Vain all the treasures of the year,
April herself grows instant old,
With you not there.

All colors and all shapes of things,
And all that dances, all that sings,
Fall lost and gray and idly fair,
With you not there.

And as the moon with magic beam
Turns barren rocks into a dream,
So with the first fall of your feet
The roughest road breaks into flowers,
All bitterness turns sudden sweet,
And bloomless thorn brakes turn to bowers.

Oh, come along the woodland track,
And give the world its beauty back!

Oliver C. Moore

Fragrance

IT TAKES ONLY A TWIST OF LIFE TO SHIFT A MAN FROM
THE REPORTERS' TABLE TO THE PRISONER'S DOCK

By Kenneth Champion Thomas

CLUSTERS of lights suspended close to the lofty ceiling shed a hard, brilliant glare over the court room. The chamber was of modern design, uniformly done in a somber gray, its only note of bright color being a large American flag displayed on the wall behind the judge's desk.

The murder trial droned on interminably, though at times its monotony was broken by flashes of human interest—for, after all, the life of a woman was at stake.

Four men, lounging, dreaming, yawning around the press table, glanced up and nodded to Jim Lawrence as he took his seat.

"Anything new?" he inquired. "Time the judge showed up."

"Nothing strictly new, Jim—that is, for us; but you've missed a lot of the stuff your frightful rag eats up. Oh, just atmosphere—sob stuff, and all that sort of thing. You can fake it up. Man, you do look seedy!"

Jim Lawrence, scribbling for his lurid newspaper, crumpled up the little he had already written. The words he had set down were meaningless. He felt simply that his mind was tired, wearied to death with unclean realities, with looking at a brown and impure stream—a never ending stream of misery. Four years he had stood on the bank and fished out sensation and thrill for his paper, and now he felt the bank crumble beneath his feet. Again and again he had shrunk back from the edge, only to scold himself for unreasonable hysteria.

"There is the prisoner in the dock," he would instruct himself. "Here am I, a hired reporter, as necessary in life as the judge, absolutely set apart from these victims of ignorance and passion and greed and lust. . . shall go home after the verdict,

eat a good dinner, and lose myself in books. I must not allow my job to get on my nerves. Dickens, Eliot, the poets—*there* I can find reality and beauty and truth!"

But more and more, of late, had he felt the bank crumbling, had he edged backward in fright. This morning, as the trial proceeded, he plainly saw the gravity of his mental disorder. This case was the last he would cover!

At the noon recess he studied his countenance in the cracked mirror of a lunch room. The reflected face showed no weakness, but the gray eyes were strained and even haggard. There were two vertical creases between the eyebrows, and a pronounced droop to the straight, wide mouth. The brow under the curly brown hair was faintly lined. With secret masculine satisfaction he had always felt a pleasure in the sheer good looks, the habitual jauntiness, of his person; but now he frowned at the image.

"Not thirty yet, and I'm old!"

He estimated the change from his five-dollar bill, nodded to the girl cashier, and walked out into the sunshine. Tobacco tasted stale on his tongue. He flung a cigarette, half smoked, into the gutter, and went at once with the drifting crowd to the court room.

Again came the sense of a slipping foothold on the bank—an abortive, fatalistic suggestion of an exchange from the press table to the prisoner's dock. It was horrible, this emerging to the surface of the fears that had slowly gathered in his subconscious mind—fears utterly without ground, grotesque, impossible of realization. He was apart from the shadows of these unreal men and women—yes, and children—who were enmeshed in the crazy pattern of their diseased natures! He was

free, a spectator, a reporter only, of their frenzied gropings, their hopeless impasses!

A reporter only? Then why was he quailing, as the prosecutor summed up for the State? Surely the man was not accusing *him*, the friendly, genial Jim Lawrence! Why, ten to one, he would invite the prosecutor, or the lawyer for the defense, to have a bite to eat, if the jury remained out through dinner time. Both men were old acquaintances. Both were cordial to reporters, who were a part of the whole system of justice and publicity.

Lawrence half rose from his seat, a dim confusion of thought appearing on his distorted face. Then he dropped back with a vague, harsh roaring in his ears, as if something in the fiber of his nerve was bending, tearing, breaking. He strove to concentrate upon the business of justice.

The afternoon, with its parade of misery, dwindled slowly; and the shadows were lengthening when Lawrence came out to the street.

II

EVEN in the pale, cloud-streaked moonlight, the changes that months of freedom—spent in his secondhand Seabright dory, along the coastal waters of North Carolina, in the neglected bays, up the small, shallow rivers—had stamped upon the countenance and the body of Jim Lawrence were unmistakably revealed. The skin that was tanned and rough in the glare of day was softly golden now. The crisp hair was bleached by exposure to the sun; the bare arms, shoulders, and neck showed firm and provocatively sculptural.

So much for the physical. Mentally—well, there was a song on his lips!

Just now, in this broad and shallow bay, he was steering carefully and looking out sharply for snags and shoals. His early astonishment at the deserted bareness of great reaches along the coast of North Carolina had long since been lost. Any meeting, except with occasional fishermen, was memorable for days; but Lawrence was appreciative of just such solitude.

The aspect of the shore slipping slowly past him was, he thought, as wild as any he had seen. A black line of stunted pines fringed the strip of shelving beach. Perfect silence wrapped land and water, seeming to brood over everything with a suggestion of secrecy, of neutral mystery, neither hostile nor friendly.

Jim's song died away. He suddenly desired to rest for the night. His half-decked boat, the Malabar, ran smoothly into a small cove, drifted her length to a stop, and eased off to the gentle restraint of her anchor. The owner stretched out on a broad cushioned thwart and stared lazily up into the sky.

Thinning clouds disclosed the stars, like powdered silver scattered and flung across a purple cloth. The pungent odor of his pipe blended with the fragrance of the pines. Forests, beaches, waters, stars, the daily hot breath of the sun—all these were full of cleanness and content and peace.

The only offset against this array of blessings was the trifling one of the exhaustion of his small savings. He had gambled against fear and depression and morbid weariness.

"I've won!" was his mental challenge to life. "I've won! Conrad's slant on life is as mistaken as his artistry is true. Men can shape their destinies, even to a conclusion. *Lord Jim*, *Almayer*, *Heyst*—yes, and *Tom Lingard* himself—were somehow spineless. There was weak timber in them. I'm breathing and living and controlling!"

Below, in the tiny cabin that sheltered the engine and Jim's bunk for stormy weather, the green-shaded lamp on the bulkhead cast warm yellow radiance. The squat marine engine rested in its bed, as if heavily asleep after an interrupted voyage. Mosquitoes buzzed against the net partition aft of the engine, and against the netted porthole.

From a shelf under the bunk Lawrence drew a long wooden case. Its raised lid displayed a row of books with worn, weather-discolored bindings—about thirty volumes in all. There were the sea-blue covers of Conrad, the red of Wells, and the dull blue of McFee, side by side with the brown of Kipling's "Outward Bound" edition. To-night it was an hour of "Java Head," followed by a final smoke and a comfortable sinking into a deep and dreamless slumber.

Some time later Jim awoke to the leisurely beat of rain on the deck close above him. He raised his head to blink sleepily out through the port. The sky, he saw at once, had grown dark, streaked with the pale tongues of distant lightning. He settled on his elbow, to enjoy, for a moment, the gathering of the storm.

He lazily dismissed from thought the

dropping of an extra anchor. The old Malabar could ride out any squall, by George, with a single hook in the mud! Her sleek, smooth, half decked hull shed wind and water like a sea gull.

He was conscious of the increasing beat of the rain, and could see, through the porthole, the white tops of low waves. It was, he thought, a sea storm in perfect miniature.

Suddenly he sat as straight in his bunk as the deck permitted. There was another sound, lower in tone and more irregular than the scream of the wind. For a time he could make it out faintly, and then it would die away, to return during a momentary lull in the squall. It was puzzling and a little disturbing; but Lawrence dropped back on the pillow and dozed off with a pleasant sense of cool comfort.

He was awakened by a rending crash and a violent lurch of the boat, which threw him sprawling on the floor boards. He made his way aft into the open, flash light in hand. The rain had stopped, but the blackness of the night was unrelieved. Something had struck the Malabar, and she was already down by the head.

He stooped to run forward into the cabin, and there, on hands and knees, under the floor boards, he found a stream of water pouring in through a ragged gap in the side of the boat. It was useless to attempt to plug the opening with canvas and blankets, and Lawrence leaped for the switch of the engine.

There was a coughing, spluttering protest, and then the motor settled to its rhythmic pace. The bow, Jim noticed, was depressed at a sharper angle. At once he realized that he must cut loose the anchor, buoy it with a bit of board, and take his chance of finding it in the morning. He stared desperately out over the choppy surface of the cove, in a doubtful attempt to locate the sandy beach.

"It's a gamble!" he muttered, as he threw the motor into reverse gear.

The Malabar moved. Lawrence held her on her blind course astern, steering with his head turned in that direction. For an apparently interminable time he doggedly kept her moving.

"Brute luck!" he exclaimed exultantly, as a thin gleam of gray at length appeared to starboard.

The Malabar edged cautiously toward the shelving beach, turned sharply, and,

with engine at slow speed ahead, thrust her bow into the sand. She rested easily, but with a heavy list to starboard. Jim Lawrence stepped ashore to reconnoiter, but returned, half angry, half relieved, to sleep until daylight.

In the grayness before dawn he examined the hole—a jagged break in the port bow, extending roughly a few inches above and below the water line.

"Whatever it was, it hit me head on," he thought.

He was at breakfast in the cockpit when he became indefinitely and uneasily aware that he was under a close scrutiny of some sort. It made him grin inwardly to think that some months ago his nervous temperament would probably have led him into some foolish mistake—perhaps an ill considered dash ashore—rather than stand the strain of an unknown menace.

Now he drank his coffee with slow enjoyment, speculating curiously. He washed the utensils deliberately, and then smoked a pipe on the beach, where he could figure on the chance of repairs to the Malabar. From time to time, with sidelong glances, he studied the forest at his back.

At noon he had the boat almost out of the water, on heavy rollers. He saw that the hole would be difficult to patch, even in the way of a temporary makeshift.

After his midday tea and biscuit with jam, he resumed work. As the afternoon wore on, the inside of the Malabar became a furnace under the direct rays of the August sun. Lawrence looked at the tiny ship's clock above the bunk.

"Four o'clock—union hours—I'm through!" he panted.

Through the port the water called him, cool and green and irresistible. Naked to the waist, in short trunks, he waded out, and then began to swim. What a sense of freedom he felt! Slowly, steadily, with extraordinary regularity, the powerful arms swung over his head to cut the smooth surface before him. The golden color of his body flashed in the sunlight, as the spray of his swimming rose and fell showering around him.

He turned on his back and floated, lazily regarding a soaring gull planing on wings that were motionless, now black in their own shadow, now flashing silver as they banked into the glitter of the sun. The bird winged off into the blue distance, and Lawrence rolled over and struck out into

the bay. A backward glance showed the Malabar visible only as a nondescript gray mound, breaking the symmetry of a narrow white beach line; and presently even this disappeared.

The former newspaper man, slave to rushing activities, recorder of turmoil and tragedy, swam on, alone under the sky, a pygmy, and yet a conqueror. Mental struggle had been left behind. Energy and health had come in the wake of clean waters and sun-filled days and starry nights.

The future? Ah, well, that was just it—the future! Certainly no problem yet. It was, Jim thought, a far-off goal to imagine, as perhaps a ship, growing rivet by rivet, plate by plate, at rest in a shipyard, might contemplate the unseen ocean. Meanwhile, for him, peace and health and honest books!

The lone swimmer turned in a leisurely arc, beginning the inward passage. The mound which would presently disclose itself as the dory came gently into vision. On, on, and it really did become the Malabar. Lawrence changed his course, swimming tirelessly for his boat. The details became clearer. Suddenly he shaded his eyes from the glare, and stared sharply. There was some one in the cabin, for a figure had unmistakably passed before the porthole.

Lawrence felt a surge of anger. He could touch the sandy bottom now, but he crouched low, with his eyes just above the calm surface. It was, he felt, a ridiculous manner of approach, and impulsively he straightened up and strode, waist deep, through the shallows. He broke into a laugh as a frail, slender woman stepped hurriedly from the cabin, shrinking back with alarmed eyes as his big body swung over the low gunwale.

"If you'll just toss me that jumper, please," he said gravely. "Thanks! Now we can talk. Oh, one moment!"

He went in at the netted door and returned with a thin cushion.

"You can settle comfortably against the back of the thwart."

But the woman remained, standing, her breathing still violently disturbed. Her vermilion lips were straight and unsmiling. There was faint color in her cheeks; her green eyes were emotionally darkened, beneath a heavy mass of chestnut hair, rising from her head in spiral coils.

"You are charming," said Jim abruptly, "but a smile would—"

"What are you doing here?" she interrupted, apparently with mounting anger.

Her gesture embraced the cove, the bay—almost, it seemed to Lawrence, the sky itself. The color had faded from her countenance, leaving it white, unmarred by the sun.

In answer to her question, Lawrence pointed to the Malabar.

"My ship, madam," he added gravely.

"I—I came on board to wait for you," she said. "We live—that is, my uncle and I—in the next cove to the south, not half a mile away. He is sick. I saw your boat, and I thought perhaps you could help me repair our motor boat. I had a collision in the squall before daybreak this morning. Oh, don't scowl! Of course it was you, and of course I should have stopped, but I knew you were close to land. Well, there it is! Will you help me?"

"My own repairs will take a couple of days, at least. Yes, I'll be glad to lend you an unskillful hand. My name is Jim Lawrence. At present I'm a horrible example of a loafer—a beach comber who combs nothing."

She gave no smile in answer to his, but gravely preceded him, vaulting lightly, dryshod, to the sand, and neatly avoiding the landward thrust of a tide ripple.

"We'll follow the beach," she directed.

"The pines are thick and hot. I am Miss de Nueces, and my uncle is Pedro de Nueces."

Lawrence stifled his amazement, for "American" was stamped all over the girl. However, a single generation in America often effects just such changes.

Another slight irregularity in the sequence of things struck him as he walked along by her side. There were no footprints in the sand; so she must have come through the woods—at great discomfort, no doubt. After all, it was a trifle. He would help the girl and her uncle, and then repair the Malabar.

III

LAWRENCE observed that the dwelling which they soon approached was little better than a fisherman's shanty. Of rough pine boards, unpainted, it had but one story. An ill constructed veranda extended crazily on the side facing the cove.

At a word from Caroline, he followed

her up the rotting steps and across the veranda, and passed directly into a large room that occupied the whole lower floor. It contained a stove, some rickety, make-shift furniture, and a large assortment of boat gear—oars, a dismantled motor, lanterns, and seamanlike coils of manila line. A faint light was admitted from the door, but the windows were covered with heavy folds of burlap and dark canvas.

From a long stare of curiosity about the strange room, Lawrence brought his eyes back to Caroline de Nueces. In the gloomy twilight he was sharply impressed by the vivid appeal of her delicate face and by an air of fragile helplessness in her uncertain gestures.

She frowned at his frank glance, and motioned him to ascend the stairs after her. The stairway was narrow, and without a handrail. Once Caroline paused, and Lawrence stumbled against her, recovering himself with a hand on her arm. At the contact he became indignantly aware that the blood was racing heatedly in his veins. It cooled at once under the lash of self-contempt.

A moment later, in one of the two upper rooms, he was coldly acknowledging the almost inaudible greeting of a middle-aged man, seemingly a Spaniard. Pedro de Nueces had the appearance of a very sick man and the choleric aggressiveness of a badly worried man. His head drooped weakly as he sat in the shadows of this upper chamber, the windows of which were as carefully shrouded as those below.

His few words of broken English covered only a formal salutation. When this had been given, he feebly motioned to his niece for her aid as an interpreter. With the girl's assistance, he proffered profuse regrets over the collision, and ended with a vehement request that Lawrence would be gracious enough to stay on until both boats were ready for sea again.

Once toward the end, in apparent impatience at the slowness of Caroline's translation, he spoke harshly to her, and turned to Jim; but his words were unintelligible to the American, and again he spoke in Spanish to his niece.

"He wants us to leave," she translated. "He is tired. For that matter, so am I."

They faced each other below, in the large room.

"Well?" she said.

"It is my turn to ask—what are you doing here?" said Lawrence.

"We fish, and we live here—that's all. Next month my uncle expects a lot of heavy supplies to be brought by boat from up the coast. There will be much work here then; and with him helpless—I wonder, oh, I wonder if you could possibly stay and help! Of course," she added, "if he comes to trust you, he will pay."

"I am, or was, a newspaper man. Do you know, Miss de Nueces, what that game does to a man? It does many bad things to him, but, along with all that, it teaches him to size things up and arrive at fairly accurate conclusions as to people and motives." He paused, and then declared bluntly: "You shouldn't be in this layout. Bootlegging is too dangerous."

Her torrent of low-voiced denials died away, futile against the bleak certainty in his face. She attempted an onslaught of derision, but her mockery was equally empty of result. Suddenly her defenses seemed to collapse, and her eyes filled.

"When you found me in your boat, I had been sent there by Uncle Pedro, to find out if you were a revenue agent. That search convinced me, and our return together gave him his answer." She continued, her voice edged with defiance: "Yes, we're smuggling a little whisky. How did you know, Mr. Lawrence?"

Jim shrugged.

"It is written all over this house. Your boat that runs at night—oh, there's no use going into commonplace deductions of that sort! It's unmistakable; and it's equally certain that you don't belong in such surroundings. You, Miss de Nueces, are the mystery, to me!"

The room was dark now. Through the opened front door came the gray shadows of nightfall, to intensify the darkness within. Jim could see the girl's face, a blurred white flower swaying toward him. Deliberately he broke into a discordant laugh.

"I never try to solve mysteries, Miss de Nueces. I avoid them, if I possibly can. As for your boat, I'll help you with it. I'm not a prohibition enthusiast. It is time for me to go aboard the Malabar. Good night!"

Now the blurred flower was close to him, breast high. He lowered his face to the fugitive fragrance of her kiss. There came a gleam of white on the stairs, a light footfall, and then silence and thick blackness.

The Malabar, stanch, but a little pathetic in her listed balance, gave homely welcome.

IV

LAWRENCE stayed, of course, for lengthening weeks—with Caroline—with love and laughter and stolen trysts of increasing difficulty, for Pedro de Nueces was getting well, and his cordiality toward Lawrence decreased in proportion to his convalescence. The rise of Jim's love for this strange girl—who had come into his life, as he admitted to himself, under a cloud—gradually absorbed his every waking thought and purpose.

Except for the immediate thrill, the high lights of danger accompanying the expected arrival of the West Indian schooner, Jim Lawrence saw but hazily his aspect as a rum runner. He passed wild nights lying well off the coast, alone in the Malabar, alone under the mysterious distance of the sky, watching the silvered splendor of the stars. They swung in wild arcs and circles above him, as his boat dipped into choppy seas and emerged clumsily in showers of spray. These were wonderful nights, purple and silver nights—nights to smoke and dream and think of Caroline.

Came the night when a ghostly schooner loomed black in the faint light of the stars. After reassuring maneuvers of identification, her sails descended in silence. Dusky seamen launched rowboats and loaded them and the Malabar with casks of whisky. Then, like a mother duck with her brood, the Seabright dory towed them in, with Jim Lawrence at the wheel, a tall, tense figure in the night, perfectly silent amid the cautious chatter of a couple of blacks from the schooner.

Nothing marred the peace of the journey along channel and across the silent bay, with the night wind sighing and whispering "Caroline, Caroline!" Then came the burying of the casks under the feeble rays of a hooded lantern, held in the shaking hand of Pedro de Nueces. Then the sailors slept on the beach by their boats, while Jim, on the motionless Malabar, waited eternities for Caroline.

She came. He grew suddenly resentful. It seemed so horrible, he told her, that she would not come out with him, clear of this sinister network that was drawing her down to almost certain disaster. Damn loyalty to her uncle!

Jim thrilled as his protests were sealed in the heat of her burning kiss.

"Big boy, big sailor, wise newspaper man, some day I'm going to love you!"

"Now, dearest, now!" he breathed. "We'll go away for a fresh start—just you and I, Caroline!"

She sighed and drew his face to the softness of her breast. Then she laughed lightly and was gone.

For four nights Jim Lawrence towed the empty boats out to sea and brought them back, deep in the water. Each night the cache was made. Each night, very late, his arms closed hungrily on the slender form that had come to represent his life. He was feeling the strain of it all—not on his toughened body; but once again the somber thoughts of his past experience were beginning to seep into his mind.

After the schooner had fled away southward, he began to give more attention to the surly aspect of Pedro de Nueces. It was becoming more and more difficult to be alone with Caroline. Her uncle was seldom far off, and now there were no more invitations to eat at the house. He was almost well now, and spent much of his time fussing over the motor in his boat, not fifty feet away from the anchorage of the Malabar.

Jim's temper grew steadily worse under the hostile surveillance. There was little to do. To lose himself in books was impossible in his present state of mind. Caroline seemed to avoid him purposely, except for the most casual of daytime encounters. He was nervous. On his lonely fishing trips he was uncertain in his handling of the dory.

One day in late September Caroline rowed over to him from her uncle's boat. Jim stared blindly, through tears, at the girl's delicate profile. She was a waif, wasted, without future. He was conscious of love and pity and anger, and from the turmoil he spoke gently:

"Caroline, dear, it is impossible to go on this way. Please, girl, look straight at it. I love you! As for you—well, you've never spoken, but, dear, I've held you in my arms, and your lips, in the darkness, have clung to mine!"

He broke off to stare, amazed, at the cold reception lurking unmasked in her eyes.

"You are talking wildly," she said evenly. "I do not care for you. We have

flirted—yes, and played at love, but it had no meaning for me. I do like you. You've been kind. You helped me when I needed you; but now winter is just around the corner. You must go. My uncle is not a safe man to cross. He hates you—I don't know why. In fact, I rowed over here to tell you, from him, that you must leave to-morrow."

"Caroline!" Jim cried hoarsely. "He is forcing you to say all this! I *know* that your warm lips, your arms, your eyes, were not lies, not bribes to pay me for running whisky. They were true and dear and good!"

The blood had ebbed from his face, leaving the tanned skin curiously mottled and blotched. His eyes were dark, suffused with mounting and uncontrollable emotion.

She checked him coolly.

"You are mistaken. I am going now. At least I do not lie now, when I warn you to leave to-morrow. My uncle has killed."

She thrust her oar against the side of the dory and rowed slowly across the water. Jim watched her go, and, with her going, he saw life's warm colors fade into the somber opacity of gray. He turned mechanically to the tightening of a valve.

The day dragged on to its close. The night, when at last it came, was cool and very still. Jim, on the Malabar, watched the stars form patterns in the tapestry of the sky. He felt a depressing sense of getting to his feet after an actual beating that had bruised and battered and permanently injured him.

A thin strand of hope that she would come back to him in the night kept him listening nervously for every sound ashore. Once, at a splash in the water, his arms involuntarily opened. Surely she would come back! A fish leaped clear, its wet side a flash of silver in the brightening moonlight.

Eight coupled strokes on the little ship's clock marked midnight, and still Jim sat and waited. Slowly, sorrowfully, it came to him that Caroline was not coming; but he must have one more talk with her, one more chance to tear down this wretched barrier.

Deliberately he dropped his automatic in the side pocket of his leather jacket. Pedro de Nueces had killed!

The front door of the house, Jim found, was securely bolted. Stepping back from

the shadow of the building into the moonlight, he whistled softly, just once, and waited. A bare white arm pushed aside the burlap draping from one of the upper windows, and then disappeared. Jim walked down to the water's edge.

Presently she came silently through the moonlight, seeming childlike in the voluminous folds of a heavy wrapper. Her hand, clutching the garment loosely over her breast, disclosed the gleaming ivory of her flesh. Her face was virginal, a pale cameo, with widened eyes and the red of parted lips.

"You are mad to come here!" she whispered. "Pedro sleeps lightly. Go! Go at once!"

"Damn Pedro! Caroline, stop torturing me! We need each other, dear—we do, we do!"

He reached out suddenly and drew her, resisting, into his strong arms. He was drunk with the fresh scent of her misty hair, with her beauty, with her youth.

She struggled fiercely, and he felt the impact of her fist against his mouth.

"You fool!" she panted, and staggered far to one side, almost fell, as he released her.

For a moment the silence held, and then, without warning, came the crash of a gun from the veranda. It split the night into a thousand screaming echoes that rolled off, reverberating through the forest. Jim saw Pedro de Nueces charge, pull up short in his stride, crouch, and again take aim. The Spaniard's countenance, in the pale light, was a distortion.

Lawrence jerked frantically at the handle of his automatic, but somehow it was caught in the corner of his pocket, and the fabric would not tear. He dropped on his knees, and, twisting, at last released his gun, just as the smuggler fired again.

Jim was conscious of a searing heat through his thigh. His excitement was gone now. It was just a question of shooting in self-defense against an unprovoked and murderous attack. He raised his arm steadily, brought his assailant into line beyond the blued barrel, and fired once. Through the pungent fumes of smoke he saw Pedro crumple and collapse in a long, slow slide into the loose sand of the beach. The body twitched once or twice and then lay without movement.

Jim knelt by his fallen foe, and rose at once.

"Your uncle is dead, Caroline," he said. "I shot in self-defense."

The girl, her face like chalk, gave no answer. She seemed dazed. Slowly she sank to the sand. She reached out and raised the dead man's hand to her lips, then fondled it at her breast. There was a broken whisper:

"Pedro—sweetheart—my own—"

Jim's world crashed about him. Wave after wave of twisted, distorted emotion broke over him. Pedro—Caroline's lover, or husband? What did it matter? She had belonged to this man, and, belonging to him, heart and body, had lied and lied. He, Jim Lawrence, had held her in his arms and told her of his love, and had drawn from her lips the warmth of a pretended response!

The tide of rage subsided and turned to pity at the girl's silent grief. For her, too, love was dead.

"Go into the house, Mrs. de Nueces," he said gently. The appellation was deliberately pronounced. "In an hour we'll leave in the Malabar for Surf City. I'll—I'll see to things, both here and there."

Caroline got to her feet. For a moment she looked at him through enigmatic eyes. Then, shivering, she turned toward the house.

The moonlight, like a mantle of silvered fabric, descended gently on the silent beach.

V

CLOSE and small was this criminal court room of the little North Carolina town. The prosecutor, the witnesses, the detectives, and the scattering of spectators always to be found at murder trials seemed crowded together in friendly confusion.

The defendant, seated beside his counsel, saw clearly but two figures, and the black-robed judge was the less compelling of the two. Jim's eyes turned to him at intervals, for moments of speculation, only to swing back and remain steadily fixed on the State's lone witness against him.

He coldly studied the pale countenance of the girl whom he had loved. She sat there, a pitiful stray of life's backwaters, her slender figure clothed in deep mourning, her face startlingly white and pure, framed against the dark wooden panel of the witness box.

Her testimony came slowly and softly from her lips, and it was definite and dead-

ly. The defendant, James Lawrence, had committed foul and unprovoked murder on the husband of the witness. The motive had been the defendant's ungratified passion for her, the witness. This was the framework of her story, erected on perjury and hate.

Dully, without visible gratitude, Jim heard two character witnesses—old friends of his newspaper days, come many miles to help him—assert his probity and good reputation. The sentiment of the court room, with the emotional falsity that is its usual urge, unmistakably turned against the man accused by this pathetic girl, so appealing in the picturesque sorrow of her bereavement.

The trial dragged on. Came exhibits.

"Exhibit A, gentlemen of the jury, is the hat of the deceased."

The audience is feverishly disturbed. It is difficult to stare at the hat and at the same time to look compassionately at Caroline, as she presses her hand to her breast, in agony—no doubt genuine—at the homely relic of her husband.

"Exhibit B, if it please your honor, is the automatic pistol of the prisoner. One bullet has been fired from it." Ah, this is a choice morsel for mental smacking of lips! "And here, gentlemen, is the bullet, which was probed from the right temple of the murdered man, as the coroner has already testified."

Jim moistened his lips and reached for a glass of water. His mind was tired, and, despite its misery, apathetic. It was becoming like a blank canvas with pictures painting themselves upon it in some weird fashion.

Ah, here is a picture that he can remember from months before! The chief figure is a reporter, insupportably weary of angling in the dregs of criminal misfortune. He sits at a press table, scribbling, looking across a few feet of carpeted floor at some prisoner in the dock. Upon his strained countenance fear is painted in livid hues. He fears that the bank beneath his feet will crumble, and will drop him into the stream of crime and death and shame in which he fishes for a living. He fears that some day a sinister twist of life will bring him in as a prisoner at the bar—

With the fading of the picture, Jim Lawrence drank again. The bank had crumbled! He was not writing about death now—he was facing it.

And then death receded, driven back by the cold, inexorable logic of the attorney for the defendant. The coroner had testified that the deceased had been instantly killed by a bullet that pierced his brain. He, counsel, would show that the defendant had been severely wounded in the right thigh. It was evident, therefore, that the deceased had shot first, and that Lawrence had answered his fire. True, the shooting might have been simultaneous, but the State's sole witness had sworn positively that the defendant alone had fired. Her evidence was manifestly false.

The jury appeared tremendously surprised. They looked at the judge, at the counsel for the defense, at the woman, Caroline de Nueces, who had gained their sympathy while she strove to swear away the life of the prisoner at the bar. They pondered almost visibly. The prosecutor summed up weakly; his case was hopeless. The defendant's counsel briefly recapitulated. The judge charged the jury.

An hour passed, and the twelve good men and true filed back to their chairs. The necessary formalities concluded, the foreman proclaimed:

"We, the jury, find the defendant not guilty."

A shaking of many hands, confused greetings, and, to Jim's astonishment, a wave of acclamation through the court room.

Then the crowd thinned. Jim walked slowly down the aisle. At the door, being hemmed in for a moment, he looked down into the eyes of Caroline—sad, wistful eyes.

He ventured a whisper:

"If I can do anything for you—"

He watched her slip through the groups of people and pass out to the street. Some one offered him a cigarette and a match. He was vaguely grateful.

The Malabar came into his thought. A good idea—first a rest, and then a newspaper job, probably in the West, and a firmer foothold on the bank. Life was strangely reestablishing itself; but for the moment, at any rate, the wonder of the process was lost on Jim.

He was again standing on a lonely and silent beach under a starlit sky, and once more he was bending low to breathe the fragrance of a flower.

UNWORTHY REMEMBRANCE

STRANGE that a heart so hard as yours,
A brain so dull, a breast so cold,
Should make this love that still endures,
And turn a leaden world to gold,
And mix yourself with heavenly things
That but for me would strike you dead!
For still of you the summer sings,
Yours still its green and blue and red;
Of these things still you make a dream,
And yours forever is the stream.

The moon is yours, and the old wood
Where you as white as she hath lain;
Forever beautiful and good
These memories of you without stain;
Oh, dryad of the antique trees,
Come back, and shame the moon again!

Thus, as I go a wandering,
I wonder if I love you yet;
You are not worth remembering,
Yet you I never can forget!

Curtis Ward

Twin Roofs

THE STORY OF A HIGHLY MODERN MATRIMONIAL EXPERIMENT

By Anna Brownell Dunaway

IT might have been the collar button that began it, as Dickens said about *Mrs. Peerybingle's* famous kettle; or it might have been the pillow hurled vindictively at the unoffending goldfish that caused Caroline to come to her amazing decision. Anyway, she told herself wearily, on the morning after the worst storm of their marital career, that she had reached the point where desire failed and the grasshopper was a burden.

"Damn it!" Joe had said, and had hurled the aforementioned pillow at the goldfish, just because he had had to get up and get Buster a drink of water, and had stumbled against the table on which the bowl rested.

It had been too much, following, as it did, on the heels of the collar button explosion; so Caroline had responded in kind. Their venomous words had catapulted back and forth, so stripped of all veneer as to make each of them wonder at the abysmal depths of the other's nature. Not only were their own personal shortcomings laid bare, but the imperfections of all the relatives on both sides, even to the third and fourth generation.

Well, as Caroline reflected cynically, such was marriage in the effete East, where the enforced companionship of two different natures usually resulted in a personality complex. There was no way out of it. She couldn't tell Joe that she was going home to mother, for the simple reason that she hadn't a mother to go to. Divorce was out of the question. With all Joe's faults, she loved him still.

Listlessly she picked up a magazine. She was just where she had been at the beginning of her miserable reflections—up against a stone wall.

Suddenly a line of black type ran across

her subconsciousness like a zigzag lightning flash. There, staring at her from the page, hitting her squarely between the eyes, as it were, was the solution:

MARRIAGE UNDER SEPARATE ROOFS

Separate roofs! The week-end marriage idea reduced to a simple equation! Caroline read on absorbedly:

If twin beds have not solved the marriage problem, nor separate rooms, nor separate vacations, why not go a step farther and try our plan—the twin roof idea? Then your husband may dwell under his own roof and yet be yours. "Achilles absent was Achilles still."

Try it, and be serene and happy, as we are, instead of miserable. Suppose you quarrel. There is no retreat; but let a man repair to a place of his own, and it is a safety valve. You escape from friends who are antagonistic. Why be compelled to stand the overpowering presence of a wife or husband just because you are married?

"Why, indeed, I'd like to know?" Caroline murmured belligerently.

It was the old question of too much familiarity breeding contempt. The marriage reformers were right. She and Joe saw too much of each other. They got on each other's nerves.

Again she read on:

Why not automatically relieve the father of the family from the daily strain of the breakfast table? Is it good for children to grow up in that crabbed atmosphere? Are you letting marriage destroy you? Are you living from storm to storm? Loosen the hidebound conventions with an easy and normal method of escape. The twin-roof plan allows for moods, for the gayety and happiness of sweetheart days, when one looked forward to "beau night." It is the ideal union for the modern, highly sensitized city dweller.

"Highly sensitized!" The strong-minded writer of the article had put her finger on the very thing that ailed both Caroline

and Joe. Here was a way out—separate roofs!

Joe could go his way, she hers, neither one tied down to a Siamese twin existence. Week-ends only they would need to be together, and then it would be like entertaining a much-loved guest. There would be no quarrels, no recriminations, no clashes of will over the children. Already she felt, in a sense, widowed, free. The thought was exhilarating.

But when, that evening, she laid the plan before Joe, he strenuously objected. It was evident that he was not up on modern marriage doctrines.

"Live under two roofs?" he demanded. "What's the bright idea? Who wants to keep up two establishments?"

"It's the modern thing that everybody's doing now, Joe," Caroline explained. "The old-fashioned idea of marriage is a constant invasion of one's inalienable rights. It's becoming obsolete."

"Obsolete?" Joe snorted. "Then parents are obsolete, and children, and homes! If everybody had the idiotic idea that married people should live under separate roofs, the house shortage question would be worse than it is now!"

"It's coming to that, nevertheless," Caroline loftily informed him. "Two roofs on a smaller scale need cost no more than one. Think of a retreat where a wife is not inexorably forced on her husband, and *vice versa*. Self-respecting married people are realizing that they cannot tolerate the nerve-racking familiarity of living always under one roof."

"Good thing old Diogenes didn't live in these days!" scoffed Joe. "The poor bird would have had to sublet an upper tub to a quarrelsome wife or husband!"

In the end Caroline overruled her husband's objections. His last feeble fortification went down before her finished and cogent arguments.

"Why, confound it, Caroline!" he pleaded. "Think of the little shavers—their mother under one roof, their father under another! Good Lord, people will razz them to death!"

"Let the heathen rage"—Caroline had recourse to Scripture—"and the people imagine vain things. This is an age of progress, you know!"

"And then the latitude it gives both parties of a marriage contract! Take the evenings, for instance. How do I know that

you are always alone? How do you know that I am?"

"But isn't marriage founded on confidence, Joe? For the matter of that, how do I know that you're not making love to your stenographer every day? And how do you know that I'm not flirting with the Fuller brush man, or the yard man? You don't find it necessary to have me shadowed, do you?"

"That's absurd, Caroline!" Joe was pacing the floor in quick strides. "But this two-roof business—by George, confidence can be abused! You don't know the world. You don't realize that by taking such an idiotic step I withdraw my protection from you."

"And I my surveillance," reminded Caroline. "I've thought it all out, Joe. Not that I shall be running around with anybody, but you—oh, well, men are naturally polygamous. There is always an element of suspicion, whether we live under one roof or two. The only difference is that the modern way gives one more liberty and yet, at the same time, it increases our mutual confidence."

"Darn fool sophistry!" exploded Joe. "I'd rather install a whole aquarium of gold fish than have our lives go to pieces like that! Hell and Maria!"

He slammed out of the house, with a feeling that the stable things of life were crumbling into ruins at his feet. His thoughts went back to the old farmhouse in Iowa where he had spent his boyhood. He seemed to see his father's feet propped up on the red-covered center table, on which lay the family Bible with its gold clasp. He remembered the silver poplar that stood just beyond the south window. He recalled the shrill pipe of his grandfather's fife. It had all left an impression that was abiding, enduring, like the everlasting hills.

Had family life been revolutionized? Was the old steadfast home of his youth lost in the mad whirl of a hectic generation? Perhaps Caroline would forget this new idea. She was always talking about some experimental departure. Perhaps it was just a whim.

But it wasn't. The idea became an obsession. Still, she might have hesitated at carrying it out, had not the house in which they were living been sold over their heads. It was now or never.

So, in the space of a few days, Caroline

and the children had taken a little apartment of four rooms, beyond the city limits, in one of the newer additions. It was in a quiet pretty spot where they could live close to nature. She rented a room for Joe in a sort of family apartment, where meals were cooked and served to roomers on the community kitchen plan.

II

To Caroline this seemed an ideal arrangement. Joe was in the down-town district, close to his work. Though far apart as miles go, they belonged to each other without obtruding. She was free to do as she liked—to receive a guest informally without consulting Joe's preferences; to carry out a tray of sandwiches and milk, if the early spring evenings were not too cool, under the cherry trees, without the pomp and ceremony of a big dinner. There was no husband to keep a meal waiting, or to telephone that he couldn't get out on account of business. It was emancipation!

Reading long-neglected books and magazines, lying lazily on the davenport in a stunning negligee, Caroline thought of the hidebound, narrow housewife she had been, warring with inefficient maids, broiling her cheeks over the chops, rolling out unending pies. Still, unaccountably, she found herself thinking of Joe. The first evening or two dragged interminably. Some one in the next apartment was singing:

"What 'll I do when you are far away,
And I am blue—what 'll I do?
What 'll I do when I'm wondering who
Is kissing you—what 'll I do?"

The song was silly, but the air was haunting. It stayed with Caroline.

There was no doubt that Joe was susceptible. He had broken two engagements to marry her. People had prophesied, after the manner of Job's comforters, that it would take a girl with as many varying moods as a chameleon had colors to hold him after marriage. Nevertheless, she had held him for five years. Her heart warmed at the proud look in his eyes when they rested on her. It was almost pathetic, his devotion. No—thus far, at least, there had never been any one else in the world for Joe but herself!

Had she been unwise to throw him in the way of temptation? So many men she knew were such *Lotharios*! Men one never suspected led double lives.

Caroline closed her book thoughtfully. Perhaps she had better relent a little and make it twice a week that Joe might come out, instead of for the week-end only.

No—she would stick it out! The loneliness would soon wear off. A radical departure such as this was like the strangeness of new trails.

On the following evening Caroline, cutting thin slices of Bermuda onion for sandwiches, heard a quick masculine tread behind her. The next moment she was unceremoniously embraced. She struggled free rather indignantly. It was disconcerting to be kissed right on the mouth when one had just bitten off a tiny taste of onion. Rubbing her smarting eyes, she wheeled about.

"Hello, Carrie!" breezed a self-confident voice. "How are you? How's Joe and the kiddies? Saw the door open, and walked in unannounced. Just hit this dinky town, and thought I'd run in and say howdy. Blooming as ever, by doggies!"

Caroline wiped her eyes, still vaguely indignant. How like Ralph Dunning, one of Joe's distant connections, to kiss her! She had met him just three times before. It was evident that Ralph was inclined to make the most of the bond of kinship.

"Why, how do you do, Ralph?" she said, trying to be cordial. "Won't you sit down? Have you—had supper?"

"Nix! Just registered at the Wellington, and came right out. Going to be in town a few days—optical business."

"Ye-es," mumbled Caroline absently. She was wondering what the larder offered in this husbandless Eden. "Joe isn't here," she explained a little hurriedly; "but we'd be glad to have you take pot luck with us—the children and I."

"Don't care if I do," accepted Ralph heartily. "Where is Joe, anyway?"

Caroline parried the question. Somehow she shrank from explaining their admirable marital arrangement to Ralph.

"Er—ah—business," she managed to say in a muffled voice.

"I see—out of town!" Ralph divined easily.

He leaned back in his chair with the manner of one who belongs. The Dunnings laid much stress on relationship, and even the most remote connection of the family tree was considered "kin."

"Gay dog, that cousin of mine!" Ralph went on. To be exact, his grandfather and

Joe's had been second cousins. "Where's the kiddies?"

He straightened his shell glasses and flicked an imaginary speck from his immaculate trousers. Ralph was not far from Joe's age, but there was a difference. Caroline noted it swiftly. She could remember when Joe was like that—dressy, like a bandbox, thinking the world well lost for an exact shade of necktie. Was that, too, something that wore off with the marriage yoke—a polish that became dull? Another count against the old-fashioned marriage!

"The kiddies?" Caroline realized that she had not answered Ralph's question. "Oh, they're playing. Here they come now!"

They rushed in wildly, hilariously.

"By doggies!" vociferated Ralph. "Not four of them! Don't tell me you and Joe have four children! What—in five years?"

Caroline flushed. Ralph was so disgustingly literal! She said quietly:

"Two are ours—Joe and Buster. The other two are a neighbor's. I'm keeping them for her while she is with her mother, who is ill."

"I see! Well, well! Thought maybe you had triplets. Ha, ha!" He eyed them speculatively. "Some sweet patooties, I'll tell the round-eyed world! Tell you what, Carrie, let's take in a movie! What say?"

Caroline protested.

"The children—I can't leave them."

"Take 'em, then," proposed Ralph largely. "Let the proletariat take us for a Sunday school picnic if they want to, by doggies!"

In the end, they all went. Caroline, walking with Ralph, the four children ahead of them, looked nervously about. If some of her friends should see them! She was glad when the show was over and they had finally boarded a car. As they found seats, she was amazed to see Ralph spring across the aisle and clap some one familiarly on the back.

"Look who's here!" Ralph addressed her loudly. "His nibs himself, by doggies! The wife said you were away on business, Joe, and here you are as big as life! Can't keep good cream on the bottom, eh? How come?"

Caroline flashed Joe a warning look.

"Just—er—got in," said Joe lamely. He made his way up the aisle. "Leaving you here—transfer."

"What's the matter with the son of a gun?" demanded Ralph. "Why don't he go on home with you?"

"He's going home," explained Caroline desperately. "That is, to—er—his home. Joe lives down town, the children and I live in Bensondale."

"Well, if that don't take the chiffon ice pick!" Ralph's face registered amazement. "What's matter? Divorced?"

Caroline's tone was icy.

"We believe in the latest theory of marriage—living under two roofs. We're as much married as ever. Joe is coming to see me every week-end. We find it an ideal arrangement. No two people can live together in perfect harmony under one roof. This is our solution."

"By doggies!" Somehow Ralph's pet expression was pitifully inadequate. "Well, you could knock me for a row of ninepins! Under two roofs, eh? Grandfather Dunning and Great-Uncle Thomas would turn in their graves! Amounts to a plain separation, if you ask me. How did you get such a fool notion?"

"We are temperamental and high-strung," said Caroline, finding it hard to explain to such a grossly material person. "At times we both lost our tempers—"

"Joe hasn't got that red mop of his for nothing," agreed Ralph.

His arm unconsciously slipped around the back of the seat. A perceptible change took place in his manner. His hunting instinct informed him of a subtle difference in their positions. A pretty woman next him, not maid, nor wife, nor widow—quite another proposition from that of a cousin-in-law! He drew a trifle closer.

"Yeah, Joe has got the temper of an owl. Don't blame you, Carrie. Glory in your spunk!"

She shivered. Ralph couldn't understand. His was too materialistic a nature to comprehend the fineness and delicacy of the modern marriage relation. He persisted in thinking that Caroline and her husband had separated. She was glad when at last they reached the house.

Ralph lingered on the porch through half a dozen cigarettes while she put the boys to bed. Caroline was glad when the neighbor came for her two children, so that Ralph would have no excuse to remain. His leave-taking impressed Caroline disagreeably, it was so assured, so intimate, so possessive.

"This business of mine may take some time," he told her. "I'll drop in often and relieve your lonesome state. So long, Carrie!"

He gave her hand a little squeeze, which Caroline hoped her argus-eyed neighbor did not see. Mrs. Dodds was one of the old-fashioned women who believe in living under one roof even if their husbands beat them.

"Who is that man, my dear?" she inquired suspiciously.

"A—cousin of my husband's," Caroline told her.

"Ah!" The monosyllable was fraught with meaning. Mrs. Dodds gathered her children into motherly arms. "Be careful, my dear," she cautioned. "Relatives sometimes take too much for granted. Living alone in this way—well, good night, Mrs. Gilman."

"Good night," returned Caroline coldly.

She was out of sorts with Mrs. Dodds—meddlesome thing! She was out of sorts with all the world.

"If only one could be allowed to live one's own life!" she argued petulantly, forgetting that the human race is naturally gregarious. "I wish I were shipwrecked on a desert island!"

III

THE idle wish came back to her the next afternoon. The clergyman of the parish called. Caroline knew him slightly.

"Gilman, Gilman!" he repeated thoughtfully. "I called at another Gilman address yesterday, in the down-town district. No relation, I presume, to J. H. Gilman of the Drake Apartments?"

"D-d-distant," stammered Caroline.

She talked on recklessly, at random. For some reason she could not bring herself to expound the modern marriage idea to this clear-eyed minister. Weren't the Drake Apartments homelike? How was the new church progressing? What about the election possibilities? Wasn't the weather cool for the season?

The clergyman seemed a little dazed by his parishoner's flow of questions. Several times he tried the forbidden topic, only to be adroitly headed off by Caroline. It was when he was leaving that, standing on the steps, hat in hand, he succeeded in putting over a direct interrogation:

"I—er—trust your husband is well, Mrs. Gilman?"

"Oh, yes, quite well! Do you think it looks like rain?"

"Not a bit," he assured her, and went back to his point. "Let me see—did you happen to mention your relationship to Mr. Gilman of the Drake Apartments? J. H. Gilman—the initials are similar. A coincidence, probably."

"No doubt," assured Caroline, with a total disregard for veracity.

She watched his departing ministerial back with cheeks oddly reddened. What a complex thing life was! Everybody's finger seemed to be in everybody else's affairs.

It was the next day that Aunt Sat put in one of her periodic appearances. Aunt Sat was angular, waspish, unmarried, and opinionated. She was as irrevocably opposed to modern ideas as she was to infant baptism and buckwheat cakes—her pet aversions. Caroline greeted her with the sinking feeling one has at the crucial moment when a petticoat slips down around one's ankles.

"So you've moved!" was Aunt Sat's characteristic greeting. "Huh! Well, I had a job finding you. Came down to have my teeth looked after. Going back on the local."

Caroline breathed an almost audible sigh of relief. Perhaps she could get Aunt Sat home without disclosing the twin-roof proposition; but at dinner the visitor was frankly curious.

"Where's Joe?"

"Wooming house," Buster announced importantly.

"What's that? Tell me what that child's saying, Caroline!"

"It's hard to understand him," murmured Caroline hastily. "Won't you have some of the string beans, Aunt Sat?"

"You haven't told me where your husband is," insisted Aunt Sat, waving the dish aside. "No, I don't eat the indigestible things. Where's Joe?"

"Oh, he's down town," Caroline tried to be casual. "Doesn't get home for dinner sometimes—press of business."

"Huh!" Aunt Sat shut her lips tightly. "You want to watch him, Caroline. More than likely he's putting you off the scent. For all you know, he may be playing around with some stenographer. Men are such fools—always ogling some girl. Well, all I can say is this—no male has ever dared to wink at me yet!"

Caroline laughed. Looking at Aunt Sat's bristling attitude and tightly shut lips, she felt that she had no reason to doubt the statement. She went out to the kitchen to bring in the dessert, and came back to see Aunt Sat answering the telephone.

"Yes, Mrs. Gilman's here. What's that? Who is it? Who? No, this is your Aunt Sat, Joe!"

Caroline fluttered forward apprehensively. Poor old Joe would bungle the whole thing! She tried to take the receiver, but Aunt Sat stood rooted firmly to the spot, her face registering doubt and suspicion.

"Huh! What's that? Rooming house! What you staying there for? Twin roofs! What you talking about? No"—grimly—"she didn't tell me. *You* live in one place and *she* in another? When did you get your divorce papers? The latest marriage theory! Do you mean to tell me, Joe Gilman—"

The receiver swung inertly from Aunt Sat's outraged fingers. She faced Caroline.

"So that's it, is it? That's the meaning of all this secretiveness! It's a good thing your mother's lying in her grave! Twin roofs, is it? Twin fiddlesticks!"

"We are just giving the theory a trial, Aunt Sat," broke in Caroline desperately. "It is better to live under two roofs than to live in discord. We are both so—so temperamental, you know. This way we see each other often, and are on the best of terms. You know, Aunt Sat, in this modern age, the old, obsolete customs cannot survive—"

"Huh!" Aunt Sat's voice was wrathful. "Don't tell me! Marriage is the same to-day as it was in Adam's time. Two roofs, indeed! If you must drive your husband out of his own home, Caroline, can't you give him a room in the attic or the cellar?"

"But you don't understand!" Caroline's voice was appealing. "That would amount to the same old thing. He would be here every morning for breakfast. He would meet up with the children. He couldn't escape the noise. The strain—"

"What is the world coming to?" Aunt Sat rose regally. "Give me my baggage. Thank goodness, my train comes in half an hour. Is this generation going stark, staring mad? Where is the good old American home of our forefathers? Children spending their time in camps—girls deserting the family circle to carve out careers—parents at the country club, the

movies, what not! And now husbands and wives living under separate roofs! It's a disgrace. If you want my advice, Caroline, you'll either get under one roof or get a divorce—one or the other. There's no half-way business about it!"

Aunt Sat clamped her hat on her head with determination, and delivered her parting shot:

"You'll not see me again until you come to your senses."

It was a fearful arraignment. Caroline had not asked for her aunt's advice, but she had got it freely. She watched the departing visitor's uncompromising stride with a sort of crushed feeling. Aunt Sat always ruffled her. There was nothing wrong with the system. It was only that people were so terribly narrow-minded.

After the dinner work was done, she sat alone in the little living room. It was a raw, chilly, April evening, and Caroline lit a little blaze in the fireplace. She had put the children to bed, and was feeling inconceivably lonely.

She glanced at her wrist watch. Only eight o'clock, and a whole evening before her. In the next apartment they were singing that silly song again.

Caroline wondered what Joe was doing. She almost wished it was his night to come, but it wasn't. He would have been so refreshing after Aunt Sat. Caroline missed his good-humored bantering.

"Never mind her, Carrie," she could almost hear him saying. "Forget it! Let the old girl go galloping on."

Her book was dull, and finally Caroline closed it. Aunt Sat had mentioned stenographers. Joe did not have a very pretty one. Could it be—but this was in direct violation of their compact, and Caroline put away the disloyal suspicion.

The house was so still that she started nervously at a rousing knock at the door. Some one had come up the three flights without announcing himself through the speaking tube. Before she could get up, the door opened.

"Hello, cousin!" How like Ralph, entering without ceremony! "I've arranged a little outing for two," he announced glibly. "Supper dance at Roselands. Put on your bonnet and come on, Carrie!"

"But—"

"Aw, come on! Saw Joe driving out with a dame. Guess if he can cut the proprieties, you can."

"He is at liberty to do as he likes," said Caroline, with dignity. "It was in our agreement not to hamper each other with any strings."

"Well, the same rule works both ways. Come on, kiddo!"

"I'll have to see if I can get the girl who sometimes stays with the children," hesitated Caroline. "I—I might go for a little while—not long, though."

After all, Ralph was a sort of relation. It would serve Joe right, too.

"Suit yourself!" Ralph strolled out to the balcony. "Step on it, kid!"

Caroline slipped into a little pale green gown that made her look very young and girlish. Ralph exclaimed over it admiringly. His manner, as he folded a wrap about her, was distinctly possessive, and Caroline resented it.

Her repugnance increased after a turn or two on the floor. It was a very gay place, Caroline noted—not at all to her fancy. She disliked Ralph's attitude—the way he held her—his presumption. He had no right to trade upon their distant relationship. They were not even third or fourth cousins-in-law.

"You're looking stunning," Ralph observed familiarly. "Joe's a short-sighted egg, believe me. By doggies, you're prettier than any flapper here! Take it from your uncle, you're foolish to tie yourself down to those kiddies."

"Let's go home," returned Caroline briefly.

"Why, what's the rush?"

"I—I'm tired."

It was a lame excuse, but Caroline felt that she wanted nothing so much as the peace and security of the living room she had left, with the children close by in their little white beds. She was thinking of Joe, too. She had said that his evenings were his own, to do as he pleased; but it hurt her—the vision of Joe driving out, as Ralph had said, with somebody—probably his pretty stenographer. She walked decisively toward the dressing room.

"Oh, well!" Ralph said airily. "We can spend the rest of the evening by ourselves, if you don't like this crowd."

After they had reached home, and Caroline had dismissed the girl, she kept wishing that Ralph would go. He was getting on her nerves. She wanted to be alone, to sit before the fire and think things out.

"Well, here we are alone, kiddo, as cozy

as you please!" Ralph threw away his cigarette and sat down on the arm of her chair, passing his arm possessively about her shoulders. "I know you're worrying about that husband of yours. Don't do it! He's not worrying about you—not so that anybody could notice. Carrie, do you know you're a wonderful girl? You've got a lure about you that goes to a fellow's head. You've got me going!" He tried to kiss her, but she jumped up and pushed him away breathlessly. "Don't be a prude, sweetie! No harm in a little flirtation. I'm mad about you, girl!"

"Stop!" said Caroline quietly. She seemed to have grown taller by inches. She swayed toward the table. "I want you to leave the house this minute—at once!"

"Cut the dramatics!" laughed Ralph, a bit unsteadily. "I'm going to kiss you, or I'll know the reason why! If you don't want to be made love to, why did you put yourself in this position? You're just stalling—that's all!"

He advanced toward her threateningly. Caroline retreated to the door. Just beyond its threshold, she ran into Joe. His arms, enfolding her, were like a high tower.

"Make him go!" she cried incoherently. "It's Ralph—make him go!"

Joe set her aside as if she had been a wax figure. He strode through the open door and addressed Ralph Dunning, who stood, hat in hand, with a vain attempt at braggadocio.

"Get out!" ordered Joe, in white anger. "I know you! Is this the way you take advantage of a so-called relationship? Only that fact keeps me from kicking you downstairs!"

"Softly, softly, cousin!" sneered Ralph. "You go too far. So you think you can flirt, do you, and then deny your wife the same privilege?" He flipped a cigarette ash with his finger. "If you don't trust your wife, *why don't you protect her?* Twin roofs, eh?"

Joe picked him up bodily by the coat collar, as one takes a cat by the scruff of the neck, and propelled him down the three flights of stairs, through the entrance, and out to the sidewalk. Then he returned to the apartment and dropped into his favorite chair.

"Well, that's that!" he said. "I had no idea he was annoying you, Carrie, or I'd have come earlier." His gaze rested

on the familiar objects, one by one—the wing chair, the desk, the white beds beyond the bedroom door. "I know it wasn't my night to come, but—well—"

"How is your stenographer?" inquired Carrie frigidly.

"She's better. Why, how did you know about it?"

"About what?"

"About her accident."

"I didn't know about it."

"Then why did you ask?" Joe was plainly mystified. "I was going to my office when it happened, and she was ahead of me. As I passed down the hall, I heard a scream. She had caught her heel somehow, and she fell down the stairs. You see, the elevator was not running. I found her with a badly twisted ankle, so I just put her in the car and took her home. She lives out in Florence. Well"—he broke off abruptly—"if you haven't had enough of this damned twin-roof business, I have. What good is a marriage certificate? Not worth the paper it's written on! Just a permit for a man and woman to live apart.

Twin tables to eat on will be next—twin churches to worship in—twin eternities—"

"Daddy"—Buster's voice came sleepily from the bedroom—"I wanna dink! I wanna dink!"

Caroline jumped up, but Joe was ahead of her.

"Carrie, if you knew how I missed that yell of his over there in that infernal rooming house! The fellow that wrote that piece of idiocy ought to be sentenced to try it himself. You bet, old man, here's your drink—daddy's coming!"

He passed her with the dripping glass, grinning like a schoolboy.

Walking swiftly to the table, Caroline picked up therefrom a well thumbed periodical, with a page turned down at the glaring title, "Marriage Under Separate Roofs." The next moment something landed with a thud in the blazing fire.

Joe, returning, found Caroline sitting before the grate. With a musing look of happiness in her eyes she was watching a thin wreath of smoke curling up from the blackened pages of a magazine.

THE RETURNING DRYAD

Out of her hiding
The spring comes gliding,
With fleet, sweet limbs and bosom bare;
And streams are running,
And meadows sunning,
And birds are back, and buds astir;
And the great ships move in a dream down the bay,
And the heart would be up and out and away
To the islands of spice and the coasts of Cathay.

For the fifes and fiddles of spring are going,
And the soft, low drums and the silver horns
From the pearly ends of the earth are blowing,
And sorrow smiles and despair adorns.

Soon in their old immemorial places
The roses shall troop and the violets bloom;
And the woodlands shall fill with the light of their faces,
And the earth smell sweet as a bride to her groom.

With delicate dances
And amorous glances,
Bolder and bolder
April's white shoulder
Flashes and flickers through emerald veils;
And the heart is again at its perilous aching,
Sad and glad to be waking and breaking
To the echoes afloat and the flutter of sails!

Richard Le Gallienne

The Big Knight

A SPARKLING COMEDY OF MODERN LIFE

By Edgar Franklin

Author of "Decent Things," "Regular People," etc.

XXVII

T WYNNE PRUDEN, a stoop-shouldered old man, with fully ten years suddenly added to his age, was shuffling in the direction of the car. Richard helped him in. Miss Alford, avoiding James's eye, backed into the little clearing where the Beswyck Pine had stood. Then she turned and sped homeward.

Again James and Daniel Finch were alone in the forest. James looked his friend up and down, and up and down again.

"Well, you are *good*!" he observed.

"Me?" Daniel cried wildly. "Is this my fault? Am I to blame because you didn't know it was George Washington's tree? What am I expected to know about trees? Am I a historian? I wanted to find you the biggest tree anywhere around, so you could do the biggest stunt cutting it down. Well, I found it. If you're boob enough not to know a historical tree when you see it, is that my fault? Shall I—"

"Listen!" James said hoarsely.

He caught his friend by either shoulder, held him there, and spoke. He spoke with perfect freedom, too, and the unfortunate thing is that hardly one word of all he said can be reproduced in print. He voiced his whole present opinion of Daniel Finch; and when he had done this, he felt better.

"All right!" said Daniel, and reeled slightly when released. "I quit trying to help you!"

"I'll say you do!" James rumbled.

"I'll pack my bag, make some excuse, and go down on the noon train to-morrow," Daniel added.

"I know you will!" James stated.

"Only one thing more, before I lay down the job," Daniel remarked, and this fealty

to his friend's best interests was touching. "You're an awful nut to let her get away with that stuff, Jim!"

"What stuff?"

"Talking to you the way she talked to you here. If she gets away with it now, what 'll she do when you're married?"

"I don't know," James gloomily confessed, and picked up his ax.

"Then lemme tell you—you want to call her on that. You want to assert yourself now, before it's too late. You want to let her know who's boss."

Again James looked his friend up and down.

"Go back, now, maybe, and call her down for telling me I'm an ass?" he inquired scathingly.

"No, not that. You've got to let this pass, of course," said Daniel; "but watch your chance, and then come across with the authority stuff, Jim. She's an awful sweet kid and all that; but she's full of steam, and once she knows she's got the reins, she'll never let go. Now, take my advice and—"

"*Damn your advice!*" James shouted in a sudden, dreadful passion, as he tossed the ax across his shoulder and strode toward Wynwood.

No crowd surged forth to greet James Barr, conqueror of big trees. The company was about, to be sure, but at the sight of James they fell silent and merely stared, much as any normal company might have stared at the arrival of the man who has just burned down the orphan asylum. Lydia sat apart with her patient, reading to him. Her eyes flashed at her betrothed, just once.

Dinner was a total failure that night. Mrs. Lane, it was rumored, lay above, com-

pletely prostrated by the calamity; and later in the evening they might have to call in Dr. Kenyon for her. An utterly broken effect had settled upon T. Wynne Pruden, too. Usually so vivacious, so nimble of tongue, he sat to-night staring at his plate, now and then muttering to himself, now and then shaking his bowed head.

Nor were the rest of them in much livelier condition than T. Wynne. Occasionally there was a stray remark or a random comment upon nothing in particular. Occasionally a forced laugh fluttered timidly into being and died again with sickening suddenness. There was a pall upon the company, and of them all none was more silent than the immediate cause of the pall.

James strayed aside immediately after dinner, seeking Lydia. He found her coming downstairs with a steamer rug.

"Honey," said James, "let's get out of this! I want to explain—"

"I can't get out of this now," Miss Alford said crisply; "not if you mean that you want to go walking, or something of that sort."

"Why not?"

"I have to look after your brother, Jim. You've shaken him horribly by—by starting all that excitement. You might at least have thought of that—your own brother!"

"Well, say! If—"

Lydia and her rug, however, had moved along in the direction of Richard, who sat at the far corner of the veranda. James, his great chest rising and falling, thrust his hands in his pockets and strode away—strode to the beach before the bath houses, where he could be alone.

After ten o'clock, Daniel Finch found him there, and seated himself beside James.

"I've been looking everywhere for you," Daniel said.

"It's too bad you found me," James remarked pleasantly.

"Oh, lay off that, Jim!" Daniel sighed. "I made a break—I admit it. I've been going around, trying to square you, and I guess what little I've done has helped some; only that's not what I want to see you about. Jimmy, he's sitting there with her, looking at the moon!"

"Huh?" said James.

"I wouldn't stand for it!"

"Why wouldn't you?" James laughed, quite genuinely. "You don't think *that's* trying to cut me out, do you? Not Dick Stevens?"

"Certainly not! He couldn't do that, Jim. No—it's the principle of the thing. The kid herself, too, you know. She's had kind of a rough day of it. She ought to be in bed."

"She ought, at that," James assented thoughtfully.

"Now, I've laid down my job, Jim. I'm going home to-morrow; but still, at the same time, I see things you don't see. Now, the great trouble with this Lydia chicken is that she never knows where she gets off. There's nobody dares tell her, I suppose," Daniel went on earnestly. "What that's going to get you, after you're married to her, I hate to think. I'm not offering any more suggestions. I'm just saying this; but, the way I look at it, the time to put your foot down is *now*! Go up there and send her to bed!"

"Well, I tell you, Danny—" James began slowly.

"I thought probably you'd feel that way about it," said Mr. Finch, and stretched comfortably on the sand. "We'll let the subject drop."

"But, I tell you, Danny—"

"Certainly, Jim!" Mr. Finch laughed queerly. "I understand, all right! That's some moon, isn't it?"

He yawned. He smiled at James. James rose suddenly.

"I guess you're right, Dan," he said briefly. "I'll send her to bed."

"Eh? Well, say! If you're going to try this, don't get cold feet just when you're halfway through!" Daniel said hastily. "Don't leave anything to the kid's imagination! Make a job of it!"

"I'll make a job of it," James said, as he walked.

Lydia and Richard were still in the dark, deserted corner of the veranda when he arrived. They were looking at the moon. For one instant, James turned cold. Then he advanced with a quiet smile.

"Getting pretty late to be sitting out here," he observed.

"We've been looking at the moon," Richard murmured.

"Aha?" smiled James. "Well, I think, honey, after a kind of hard day, *you* better go to bed now."

"What, Jim? Oh, I will presently," said Lydia. "We—we've just been looking at the moon."

"I know, but—but the moon 'll be doing business other nights," said Mr. Barr, not

so gently. "I think you better go to bed, Lydia."

In a steady and inquiring fashion, Miss Alford looked up at him.

"Well, Jimmy, when I feel that it's necessary for me to go to bed, I shall undoubtedly go to bed," said she. "Why this anxiety to have me go to bed?"

"Because it's time!" said James, and she should have known that he was saying this dangerously.

"Oh, pshaw!" said Miss Alford, and tucked the rug around Richard.

James Barr straightened up. His lips set hard. Danny, as he now understood, was dead right! He expanded his chest.

"Lydia!"

"Oh, what? What is it?" Miss Alford asked.

Slowly, impressively, James Barr raised his right forefinger until it pointed directly at the open main entrance of Wynwood.

"Lydia," he said in a vibrant bass, "*go—to—bed!*"

Unquestionably Lydia Alford should have started back timidly, should then have risen in some confusion, and should meekly have retired to her chamber. Instead, she merely looked up at James with blank amazement.

"Are you—are you speaking to *me*?" she asked.

"I'm certainly speaking to you, Lydia."

"Well, but—"

"And I think we'd better not have any argument about this, honey," James went on, gently but very firmly, despite the peculiar fluttering doubt that was seeking to register its presence in his brain. "Run along now!"

"Why—why, you're ridiculous!" returned Lydia angrily.

"Is that so?" Mr. Barr inquired ominously. "Listen, Lydia! You and I are going to get married pretty soon, and maybe there are some things better settled now than afterward. Get me, kid? What I mean, when people are married, it's a sure thing somebody's going to be boss of the outfit. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned, but it always seems to me that—"

"Jim!" came from Richard, in the odd-est little bark.

"You keep out of this!" James snapped.

"No, I'm—" Mr. Stevens began hotly.

"Yes, please do keep out of it, Dick—please!" Lydia said quietly.

Curiously enough, she was on her feet

now, and, having come close to James, was staring at him. So steadily, so strangely was she staring up at him that James paused in his speech and merely gazed at Lydia. She was going to talk back—he saw that. Well, let her talk! Now was a good time for her to start that and learn something!

But it seemed that Lydia had no intention of talking. Having gazed at James for fifteen seconds, she turned and stepped into the house.

"Are you — er — going to bed now?" James asked quietly.

In the doorway Miss Alford paused, looked back, and laughed.

"Why, of course!" she said.

Then she moved on—upstairs, apparently. James Barr nodded grimly at his supposed brother.

"That's how it's done!" he explained rather complacently.

XXVIII

RICHARD, in the dark shadows, offered no comment whatsoever. James, having sighed with what seemed to himself rather exaggerated relief, turned, descended the veranda steps, and strolled rather jauntily down the path that led to the beach and the bath-houses.

Daniel looked up eagerly.

"Put it over?" he asked pointedly.

"That's what I went up to do."

"It certainly is, but did you do it?"

"I certainly did," said James.

"She's gone to bed?"

"She's gone to bed."

Daniel Finch nodded to express his complete approval.

"Well, that's fine, Jim! That's great stuff!" he said. "You'll never be sorry for taking that stand! Let me tell you about this chicken, Jimmy. She's wonderful, but she's been spoiled—see? She's had too much money, and—"

"Oh, dry up!" James snapped, and scowled at the moon.

"Huh?" said Daniel, and stared hard.

"I—sure! I was only speaking as between old friends, Jimmy."

"All right! Drop it!"

Mr. Finch studied James in his intelligent way.

"Say, Jimmy, you're not sore at yourself for doing the right thing?"

"No, I was thinking of Stevens. He tried to butt in."

"Did you let him?"

"I did not. Or—or maybe it was Lydia shut him up. She told him to keep out of it, and he did. I'm going to knock that guy's block off before I'm done with him," James said irrelevantly. "He gets on my nerves."

"Oh, that's foolish!" Daniel laughed. "He's served his purpose, Jim. He's done all you wanted of him, and—"

There Daniel stopped suddenly, and looked at the spot just behind James. James turned, and started slightly, for Richard Stevens was stepping springily toward him along the beach. Richard was smiling, too, although faintly.

"Come down to—look at the moon?" James inquired.

"No—I've been looking at the moon for some hours, thank you," Mr. Stevens said, and his voice was positively sweet. "I came down for another purpose, Barr. I think that perfect candor should obtain between brothers, don't you? So I came to tell you, as candidly as possible, that you're a fat-headed boor and the most unspeakable damned bounder that ever walked in shoe leather!"

"You—*what*?" said James Barr.

"And the next time, Barr, that you address Miss Alford as you did up there on the veranda, I shall exercise the purely brother privilege of pounding your overfed hulk into a jelly! I'll turn you into a hospital case, just as surely as you breathe? Can you grasp that?" Mr. Stevens went on, quite astonishingly.

For the moment, unutterable amazement stopped James's breath. The moment passed, however, and he breathed again.

"Say, rat, do you know the sort of risk you're running in talking to *me* like that?" he demanded. He was surely a mighty figure, towering there in the brilliant light of the full moon. "Haven't you got brains enough to know that I could pick you up and rip you in two pieces?"

Richard's lips curled. He glanced up—and his open right hand flashed back and flashed forward again, meeting James's cheek with a sharp crack like the snap of a whiplash.

It was a wicked slap, too. It caused ten thousand stars to dance before Mr. Barr's eyes during the incredible instant that witnessed the rocking of his head to the southward; but he was erect again now. From his lips a wordless roar was just beginning

to emerge. He raised both great, doubled fists.

At the risk of his very life, Daniel Finch threw himself between the two other men, placed a hand on either chest, and pushed hard as he cried:

"Wait! Wait! Wait!"

"Wait for nothing!" James snarled. "No man can—"

"Wait!" Daniel panted. "If you're going to do this thing, do it right! Do it decent! Is there going to be a scrap here?"

"No, but there's going to be an awful dirty murder!" wheezed from James.

"You want to take a chance fighting him?" Mr. Finch asked of Stevens.

"If you'll just get out of the way!" said Richard eagerly.

"All right! Wait! Let's get it understood, before you start, how you're fighting. Get your coats off! Get your shirts off!"

They were already at this task.

"Now, about the length of the rounds and the periods between rounds," Daniel went on briskly.

"There are no rounds. This is a finish fight!" declared Mr. Stevens.

"There's not going to be any time for a round!" James laughed wickedly. "Get back there, Dan!"

"No! Wait! It's understood between you that this is a finish fight, then? All right! I'll have to be all the referee there is, I suppose. Please box clean, will you? If either of you gents gets excited and pulls a foul, that gives the fight to the other fellow. That's agreed?"

"Finch," said Mr. Stevens, and emotion rendered his tone somewhat shaky, "*anything* is agreed, if you'll just step aside!"

"I will in one second," said Daniel. He took out his watch and considered it in the moonlight. "I'm going to start you on the even minute. Get set!"

He stepped back quickly. He looked at them, standing there, and his pulses hammered, for this was going to be some battle! At first, he had assumed that James would have it all his own way—that he would wreak his fury on the unfortunate victim and—well, the doctor would have to do what he could afterward. But, looking at Richard's bare arms and shoulders, there was a suggestion that the contest might not be quite so uneven. This fellow had muscles like a trained fighter's—not big and bulging, like Jim's, but smooth and rippling, and plenty of them.

"Ten seconds more!" Daniel announced thinly.

He stared at his watch. He raised his hand, preparatory to swinging it downward as a signal that the entertainment might begin; and it was actually moving when, with a rush, Miss Lydia Alford came upon the scene. Yes—down the beach came Lydia, with the speed of an arrow. Her lovely person whisked between them, and she threw a protecting arm about Richard.

More than this—she turned upon James a glare of wonderful eyes that was no less than venomous.

"What does this mean? What are you doing? How dare you?" she gasped.

"Lydia," James said hoarsely, "this is men's business, and—"

"Men! You're not a man! You're a beast!"

"Lydia! I—"

"Your own brother, and a sick man, and a man so much smaller than you!" flamed from Miss Alford. "You—you great hulking coward! You—" Here Miss Alford left her charge and stepped up to James. "If I were a man, I'd thrash you within an inch of your life!" she said. "I'm not, but I can hire men, and they have some big ones in these woods! If you lay one finger on your brother, I promise you that I'll have you horsewhipped! I'll have the very skin flayed from your bones!"

Her eyes blazed. She trembled. She was, in fact, a woman of so much spirit that Mr. Barr merely dropped his hands and—well, yes, gaped at her.

Richard was at her side again.

"Lydia, I think if you will just run along, as he suggests—" he began.

"And leave you here to be beaten to death?"

"It's remotely possible that I may not be beaten to death," Mr. Stevens smiled.

"I'd rather like to settle that point!"

Miss Alford's brows contracted for a brief instant.

"He hasn't, we know, but haven't *you* any conception of behavior in civilized circles?" she asked. "Wynwood has never been used as a fight club before!"

"Well, that's true, too," Mr. Stevens murmured. "I—I beg your pardon, of course, and—"

"Yes! Now I want you to go to bed!"

Mr. Stevens gazed at James Barr. He gazed yearningly, and his teeth shut with a click.

"Lydia, couldn't we strain a point, just this one time?" he asked pleadingly. "There won't be much noise to this, and nobody need know."

"I want you," said Miss Alford, "to go to bed!"

Here she picked up Dick Stevens's coat, and also his shirt, and handed them to him. Muttering rather confusedly, he glanced just once more at James—and went away from there, at Lydia's side.

Even after half a minute, James could do no more than stare in the direction they had taken.

"He quit cold!" he muttered. "He quit absolutely cold!"

"Well, what would you expect from a guy like that?" the keenly disappointed Daniel asked. "Maybe they had it all framed before he started down here."

"Maybe they did," James mumbled.

"Only one thing!" said Daniel warningly, and tapped his friend's big arm.

"Listen!"

"What?"

"You're a terrible dumb egg to let that chicken talk to you the way she talked just now, Jim! Now my advice—"

And there, with a rush, the stupor seemed to leave James Barr. He whirled about and glowered down at his friend.

"Your advice! Your advice! Say, I've had enough of your advice!" he shouted.

"If I hadn't taken your advice and tried to send her to bed, this wouldn't have happened! Now I've got *this* to square with her, and how I'm ever going to—say, you! D'ye know what's good for you?"

"N-no, Jim," Daniel admitted.

"Well, I'll tell you!" cried Mr. Barr. "Shut up!"

Then he strode away. Daniel followed, ten paces behind.

To tell the truth, Daniel was not really comfortable until the moment when James, at his side in the darkness, emitted the first real snore. Not one word had passed between them since that last harsh command of Mr. Barr's; and while, of course, a big, fine, square boy like Jim never would have thought of beating up a friend, there is no denying that Daniel had been quite nervous.

Breakfast just missed being as complete a failure as had been last night's dinner. The pall still hung over the Wynwood party. T. Wynne himself, the most sorely

smitten, was the only one who seemed to have recovered some measure of good spirits. He spoke lightly, even when addressing James.

"Oh, by the way, tree chopper!" he said, as they rose.

"I know!" James said bitterly. "I don't know what to say."

"Well, that's over and done with, of course," Mr. Pruden sighed. "I spend most of my life looking for the silver linings, and I imagine that I've found the one to this sad affair. Jim, you—you really feel the need of exercise?"

"I did yesterday."

"Because, if you do, there are four pines down the road, toward the station, that need cutting out. I want the timber in 'em, and, off and on, I've been trying for weeks to get men to do the job. It's almost impossible to get men up here at this time of year."

"I'll take 'em down for you," James said, almost eagerly. "I—I don't know. There's a lot going on inside me just now that I could work off with an ax."

"Will you really?" T. Wynne asked brightly. "When?"

"Whenever you say."

"Like to go at it this morning?"

"There'll never be a better time," said James.

"Well, that's splendid! That's mighty nice of you, Jim," Mr. Pruden stated heartily, and patted Mr. Barr's shoulder. "That's fine! Let's go down and look them over."

"We'll take the ax with us," added James. "Dan, get the ax!"

Daniel went at once, and without offering the slightest objection. He met them by the road.

"Shall I—go along with you?" he suggested timidly.

"You better. You might get started and give somebody around here some advice, if I left you," James said—cryptically, so far as T. Wynne was concerned.

Mr. Pruden chatted as they walked. James said little. Mr. Pruden, at the end of half a mile, turned into the woods and walked still farther.

"There! See those four trees?" he said presently.

"I see them. They'll be down in two hours or so," sighed James. "What are you going to do about getting them out of here?"

"True enough!" said T. Wynne, and considered. "Perhaps I'd better go now and begin telephoning for teams? Yes, I believe I'll do that, Jim."

So he went, and James began to chop, slowly, steadily, with a terrific driving blow that expressed some of the turmoil within him. Daniel merely smoked until the first tree had crashed.

"I didn't say anything to 'em about going down on the noon train," he submitted.

"No? Why not?"

"Well, last night everything—everything was sort of excited, and—"

"You'll go down on the night train, then," James remarked, as he picked up his ax again. "I'm not going to have you around while I'm getting this squared with Lydia."

He chopped vigorously—and chopped—and chopped. Eventually, another tree went down.

"Jim!" said his friend.

"What?" said James.

"Could—could I suggest one thing?"

James smiled rather horribly.

"Yes! If you want to get the flat of this ax across the back of your head, *try it!*" he snarled.

So Daniel did not try it. He merely sat aside and smoked, while time passed and the blows rained. After a longer period, the third tree descended forever. Then Daniel, whose countenance was growing strangely anxious, said:

"Jimmy, what I wanted to say—"

"I don't want to hear it!"

"Maybe not, but this—"

"I don't want to hear it!" James literally bawled at him. "I've heard enough from you!"

He went to work again. More blows rained, and more chips flew, and more time passed, while Daniel sat watching with a strange, wistful smile, now and then shaking his head. There was a fourth tremendous crash!

"Phew!" said James, and dabbed his forehead. "I'm glad there aren't five of them! I'm getting weak."

"Well, say, Jim, now that—"

"You want to make this suggestion?"

"I'd like to."

James Barr gazed down at his friend. He also doubled his great right fist and swung it significantly.

"All right, Danny! Go ahead and make it," he said.

Daniel Finch shrugged his shoulders and followed, as James left the forest and returned to the road.

James felt better—so much he admitted to himself. Some of the ugliness had been worked out of him by way of the ax blade. He had at least partially regained his balance, and at last he felt able to cope with the matter of Lydia.

Setting himself right with Lydia was going to be a considerable task. This James knew quite well, for he had met other spirited, proud young women before meeting Lydia. It would take endless tact and endless slow, painstaking labor; but with Daniel Finch out of the way he would manage it.

"All eating!" he observed briefly, as they came up the path to Wynwood's deserted veranda. "Wait till I put this ax away, Dan."

He headed for the barn, and Daniel trotted after. He strode across the barn, a hungry giant much refreshed. He even smiled at Sanders, who was grinding a brush hook. Sanders smiled back in astonishment and observed:

"Oh, you two didn't go, hey?"

"Didn't go where?"

"To the wedding," grinned Sanders.

"Wedding? Whose wedding?" James asked, in mild astonishment.

"What's that?" grunted Sanders. He ceased his grinding, and looked at James with anything but mild astonishment. "Why, your own brother's wedding, Mr. Barr!"

"My what?" gasped James.

Mr. Sanders rubbed his forehead.

"It ain't possible I'm mistaken, is it?" he asked. "Your brother's marrying Miss Alford, over to Tuttle's Falls, ain't he?"

XXIX

It has been repeatedly noted that at intervals, these days, a fog had seemed to be enshrouding the mentality of James Barr. For some seconds this fog did the new trick of pressing down upon his brain like something weighty and substantial. James could not think, could not speak, could not move; but the worst of it passed, and he managed to inquire feebly:

"Are you—are you crazy?"

"Why, no, I'm not crazy!" Mr. Sanders responded with some acerbity. "Didn't the whole crowd of 'em start—"

"When?" barked James.

"Near two hours ago now. They piled into the three cars—everybody on the place did—and they went off like mad!"

"While I was down there chopping—"

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" Daniel Finch cried out, with such ferocity that Mr. Sanders started back and reached for his brush hook. "Isn't that what I was trying to tell you? Isn't that what you wouldn't let me tell you, you big stiff? I *knew* Pruden was framing something when he took you down there! That's what I wanted to say, and—"

"Sanders, is this *right*?" rumbled dreadfully from James.

"Of course it's right! I didn't know a thing about it till five minutes before they started. Two of the young men were talking about it out here, and they seemed quite excited, and—"

"Tuttle's Falls? *You're* not trying to put over something?" James asked, and towered above the other.

"My good Lord, Mr. Barr!" the caretaker gasped. "I wouldn't—"

"All right! Where's there a car?"

"There ain't one. They took all of 'em—and my flivver there's been busted for a month. Two pistons out of her now, and—"

"Hook a horse into that damned buckboard, then!" James Barr roared. "Be quick about it! I'll kill the horse, but I'll get there!"

Mr. Sanders now stepped behind the grindstone.

"There ain't a horse on the place, sir," he explained. "Mr. Pruden ordered them all down to the junction, to get shod. The boy took 'em over for me."

"Then d'ye mean to tell me that I've got to stand here and—" James began, and stopped. He beat his chest. Then he controlled himself. "What is there around here that 'll get me to Tuttle's Falls?"

"Not one solitary thing!" Sanders chattered. "Look here, mister, it's none of my business, but don't get so het up over this! You can't get after 'em, if that's what you want. There ain't a thing here on wheels, except the truck that brought the lumber over last night for the new garage, and that 'd never—"

"Where's the truck?" James panted.

"Stands out back, but—"

James was gone, crashing blithely through the rear door of the barn and tearing it from the hinges. Now he was staring

at the big red truck in the lane. The gleam in his eye was quite insane.

"Why, this is a five-ton Mismmer!" he shouted. "This is the truck I sell! This truck—how d'ye get out of this alley?"

"Straight by the barn, but that ain't going to help you none," Mr. Sanders shouted. "You can't make no time with a truck to compare—"

Already, with James in the seat, the engine had roared into life. Daniel was climbing dizzily to a place beside his friend.

"You! Is there a short cut to Tuttle's Falls?" James roared.

"Why, yes—if you was afoot, you'd take the old road through the woods where—where you was lumbering yesterday, I understand. That stops halfway up the mountain, but there's a trail afterward. Cuts off twelve or fourteen miles, and—hey, where you going? You can't make that with a truck! That's Sugar Mountain the trail goes over, mister! You can't make it with a truck! Why, there's spots where—"

"You don't know what I can do with this truck!" James laughed wildly, as he rumbled past.

"Jimmy!" Daniel gasped, clinging to the side. "If that old bird says you can't make it—"

"That 'll be because I'm dead!" James shouted.

"Yes, but—but a mountain—and the way he spoke it must be some mountain, at that!"

"Don't bother me!" James cried savagely. "I'm going to beat 'em to it! No dirty rat can snatch a girl away from me like that! I'll grab that kid, and I'll tie her hands and her feet, and I'll load her on back there, and when they see her again she'll be Mrs. James Barr! Because so help me—"

More than this he probably said, but it missed Daniel Finch. There were several reasons. The wind was one of them. Times without number it had been urged by James Barr that the Mismmer is the one truck which, returning empty, can make speed. It had been his belief that this was very probably true, but now he knew it to be true. The apparently crazy vehicle was whirling along very much like a racing car—smoothly, swiftly, through roaring air.

And yet they were not going so smoothly now, were they? They had swung into the old forest road, with a swerve of con-

siderable violence. Daniel Finch, with a thin screech, had bounced up and struck the substantial hickory bow of the canvas top above the seat, collapsing thereafter. It was James's impression that Daniel had left the truck altogether; but there he was, clambering to an upright position again, and chattering absurdly.

He was endeavoring to speak, but James did not heed. He tried again, and still James did not heed, for this forest road was growing rougher and rougher, and the job of driving demanded all his attention. He bent over the wheel. He pushed the spark a little farther forward. They bounded over a great rock, and there was a crash behind. Daniel's arms were about the neck of his friend as he screamed:

"She's busted! She's busted! The whole damned thing's smashing up!"

One lightning glance James directed over his shoulder. Then he drove on.

"That's just the body fell off," he explained, in a bellow. "That's fine! Now we can make some time!"

"Yes! I was trying to tell you—" Daniel essayed.

Here he ceased speaking, for James had shaken off his grip with one jerk, and Daniel just caught the side in time to save himself from pitching over. After that he merely clung and chattered, and tried hard not to watch the road ahead.

It was a prospect sufficiently terrifying to nervous eyes. The road was growing narrower, and presently there seemed to be no road at all, but only a little path—aye, and a path which led, not straight ahead, but almost straight upward!

"Well, you can't make that!" Daniel screamed. "Slow down!"

James paid no heed.

"Stop!" gasped Daniel, quite vainly. "Because—"

Again his words were annihilated. They were negotiating the little path now, and at just the same speed. To the right they leaped, tearing down a sapling. To the left they leaped, tearing a larger tree out bodily by the roots. To the best of Daniel's terrified understanding, they were no longer on earth—they were flying!

Yes, mile after mile, as he bounced and pitched and screamed and chattered, as he felt his poor head hammering at the hickory bow, as his cold and desperate hands clung to everything in sight, they were simply flying! Up above there, or directly ahead,

as he suffered brief, open-eyed periods, there was just sky—sky, toward which they were bounding and crashing and reeling—sky, where nobody but an aviator ever wants to be, and Daniel was no aviator!

"Hold tight!" James barked.

"Well, what d'ye think I've been doing ever since—"

"This is the top! We're going down now!" Mr. Barr added, and returned to his driving.

They were indeed going down now. For an incredible five seconds they had hung poised on the edge of a rock which, to the best of Daniel's belief, was the brink of eternity. At any rate, as one glanced down, there was really nothing at all immediately below. Now, causing even James to cry out rather emotionally, they were sliding—sliding—ah, they were going to slide into that huge tree and drive the engine straight through themselves and—no, they had missed it! James was aiming for that bigger one—no, he had missed that one, too!

Very briefly, Daniel dared to look. Far, far below, there was flat country. He knew now what people meant when they talked about "God's country"—it was the flat kind. There was a winding road down there, and, perhaps a mile along the road, a little town which Daniel assumed to be Tuttle's Falls.

They were no longer pointing downward with that sickening, plummet effect; they were coasting quite pleasantly, at an angle hardly steeper than that of an unusually steep cellar door. They were crashing over rocks, too, and tearing down trees, and twice, Daniel sensed, they had passed straight through a rail fence. However, if only he could hang on for a few more hours, there seemed to be a chance of surviving. Daniel closed his eyes.

"There!" called James Barr triumphantly, just four minutes later.

"What? What now?" Daniel gasped, as he opened his eyes.

"There's the State road, you poor pup!" Mr. Barr explained contemptuously, and slowed down still farther. Then—with some justice, perhaps—he seemed to become conscious again of his own prowess, for he added: "Danny, I'll bet there's not another man in the country that could have taken a truck chassis over that mountain!"

"Yes, and I'll bet there's not another man in the whole world that 'll ever take me over it again!" said Mr. Finch.

The truck rolled on swiftly, and so James came again to Tuttle's Falls—not so prettily, perchance, as on that other occasion; but he was there, and his large chin was grimly set, and there was a bad light in his eyes as he looked about for signs of the Wynwood party.

He located them with ease. The chummy roadster affair that was Pruden's, the snappy little vehicle that was Lydia's, and the larger car which belonged to one of the crowd—all were there, standing at the curb before the little white church, with its picket fence and its grassy graveyard. James stopped with a bang and leaped to the ground.

"Well, once upon a time, Pruden wrecked a wedding for me," said he; "and believe me, Danny, here's where I—"

He paused, gazing. From the doorway of the little church, not a dozen yards away, the company was just emerging. There was T. Wynne Pruden, who started and paled and looked exactly as if he were viewing a ghost. There was Mrs. Lane, who screamed faintly. There was the knot of young people, who stared at James—and some of them began to laugh, and some of them began to whisper and gesticulate.

Above all, there was Lydia herself, on the arm of Richard Stevens; and upon the hand that she raised James caught the glint of a brand-new wedding ring! But it was a strange, new Lydia, as James numbly grasped—a Lydia altogether altered. The flashing smile, the bold, sparkling eyes, that vaguely defiant, daring, square-shouldered effect—all these things were missing. It was a wonderfully beautiful, soft-eyed, rather timid Lydia, who clung suddenly to Mr. Stevens's arm.

T. Wynne Pruden placed his smallish person before James and smiled.

"Well, well, well!" said he. "Got here, did you? Er—got here, eh?"

"Yes—I drove the—truck over!" James said mechanically.

"Well, well! Got here, after all!" pursued T. Wynne. "Well, you'll have to forgive my little joke, eh, Barr? You'll have to overlook—"

"Are they—married?" floated from James's lips.

Richard detached himself and advanced alone.

"We're certainly married, Barr. I'm sorry, if you feel that I've played a low trick on you; but I haven't. I—"

"Wait!" said James's still voice. "Let me get this right. You're *married*?"

"It was sudden, but it was for the best. We are!" smiled Richard.

Then, not ostentatiously, he braced himself and waited for the outburst. It did not come. James, standing there with hands limp, seemed wholly stunned.

"Well, if you're—married, why—why, of course, you're married!" he said.

"But there's one thing I want to say, Barr," Stevens added.

"Uh?"

"I never told them I wasn't your real brother."

"Then—then how did they know?"

"Jim," said Richard, "they tell me they suspected it from the very first."

"Uh!" said James, and still he had not moved a muscle.

"Well, that's the way to take it! That's the way! Gad, I'm proud of you, Jim!" T. Wynne cried hysterically. "Now get up on your truck and come back for the wedding breakfast!"

It may have been prearranged, or it may have been instinctive, but some remarkable team work was being done by the Wynwood party just now. Quite automatically, they had moved to the cars and into the cars, and already three engines were running. James turned slowly, and frowned, apparently without comprehension, at the picture of Lydia, in her snappy car, with Richard at the wheel.

"Well, come along!" T. Wynne cried cheerily, and beckoned James.

The cars started, but James did not go along. Instead, after heaving one tremendous sigh, he looked all about him, dazedly, and then, as if his knees had given out, he sat down suddenly upon a tombstone and rested his head in his hands.

"Well—hey, listen! What's the matter with you?" Daniel asked quickly.

"I dunno. Lemme alone!" James grunted thickly, and held more firmly to his cranium. "I think I'm going to have some kind of a stroke!"

Driving along at the rear of the procession in his own little car, T. Wynne Pruden talked softly to Mrs. Mary Lane beside him—softly, but with tremendous satisfaction and many, many chuckles.

"The only thing to do, Mary—positively the only thing to do!" said he for the dozenth time. "Rush the whole affair through

headlong before she had a chance to change her mind again! And I did it—I most surely did rush it through! I question whether, even now, Lydia realizes that she's married."

Mrs. Lane nodded weakly.

"I'd forgotten the confounded truck," T. Wynne chuckled on. "Harry thinks he must have taken it over Sugar Mountain. That couldn't well be, but—oh, drat the fellow! I'll send him packing as soon as he turns up—oh, nicely, of course, but I'll send him packing!"

For another half mile he beamed at the road. He spoke more seriously.

"You know, Mary, when that boy Dick first turned up, I knew he was the very man for Lydia; and how astonishingly it all worked out, didn't it? Seemed as if fate itself was helping me with the job. Just one item—wasn't it remarkable that Kenyon should have been a fraternity brother of Dick's? The boy told me he took pencil and paper and wrote full directions for Kenyon to read, while they talked, with Barr sitting in the next room not ten feet away. Ha, ha, ha!" But that he was driving, Mr. Pruden would have paused and slapped his thigh. "Well, well! You're too tired to be much interested, aren't you, Mary? Doesn't matter. The great thing is that I've done my job at last. I've married Lydia to the right man!"

And he smiled—a smile of that complacent utterly assured self-confidence which is such a rare joy to its fortunate possessor. Mrs. Lane stirred. As yet she had not smiled once.

"Yes, if—if he is the right man, Wynne," she said dubiously. "This has all been so sudden, so pell-mell, so helter-skelter, you know. It was all done to save her from Barr—I understand that; but really we know nothing about—"

"Why, Mary! Why, upon my soul!" Mr. Pruden cried in genuine astonishment. "I've been neglecting you, haven't I, in all the rush? I haven't kept you up to date at all. Mary, don't you know which Stevens this is? This Dick is the boy who has been fighting tooth and nail for two years for the Martin Stevens millions—they really belong to him, you know, and he's been battling for them to the very last ditch. Why, he told me last night—or at two o'clock this morning, rather, when Lydia and he and I were finishing the grand con-

ference—that he was down to just fourteen dollars when Barr came along with his asinine proposition. He's going to get his money, by the way. Garford was telling me all about the case when he was in the office last month. The boy has established a perfectly clear title at last. Dear me, yes! In another two or three months at the very most, Dick 'll be a rich man; and otherwise, of course, he's ideal."

This, it might have seemed, should have produced a rather happy reaction in Mrs. Lane. It did nothing of the kind. Lydia's aunt turned pale and caught at T. Wynne's arm.

"But, Wynne!" she cried. "It isn't possible that—that Lydia really has married the right man at last? That the—the suspense is really over?"

"But it is!"

And now the good lady's hand clawed in a feeble, futile way. Twice Mrs. Lane swallowed.

"W-Wynne!" she faltered. "Wynne, I—I think I shall faint!"

She managed it this time, too. T. Wynne Pruden had to pause at a roadside spring and get water in the little folding emergency bucket before she could be revived.

XXX

JAMES BARR was at least no physician. His diagnosis had been altogether faulty, and he had no stroke.

But he did sit there, minute after minute, with his head in his hands, muttering incoherently, while Daniel looked around helplessly and wondered why some one did not come to offer aid. He was on the point of entering the church in search of help, when James looked up.

He was grinning! Daniel stood quite fascinated. And now James was laughing—gently at first, and then not so gently. James, in fact, presently broke the churchyard calm with a series of loud guffaws.

"Well, that was a hot one!" cried James.

"Yes—he got the girl. Is that funny?" Daniel asked.

"It is if you know where the laugh comes in, Danny," said James, and grew calmer. "I'll tell you—"

"Why, Jimmy!" burst from Mr. Finch in a great, glad cry, as his old friend faced him squarely. "*You look like yourself again!* That's the first time you've looked like yourself since the night we hit McGlown's!"

"I know. That's why I'm laughing," said a perfectly natural, perfectly normal James Barr. "I can think straight again. Yes, that's a fact! I can think the way I used to—you know, so it gets somewhere and doesn't hurt when you try."

He gazed on at his friend.

"Danny, I tell you," he pursued, "this gang of Lydia's, with their fool talk and their little white balls and their cards—I never could have stood for that stuff as a steady diet. It drives me crazy. It makes me sick. Sometimes, back there, I thought I'd go wild watching them and having to listen to 'em. If I'd married her, we'd always have had to have some of 'em around the house. You know what I mean?"

"Sure!" said Daniel. "Only—"

"And then the kid herself. Not that she isn't a wonderful kid, and all that. She is; I'd be the last one in the world to say a word against Lydia, Dan. Just look at her, and you go sort of crazy. I did; or maybe it was the moon—I don't know. But what I started to say—I guess she's always been rich, and she's got too big an idea of herself. She's naturally bossy, and she's inclined to be fresh. I never could have stood for a wife like that, Dan. I'm too broad-minded and—and easy-going and generous to have a wife like that. Sooner or later, I'd have wrung her neck."

"Well—sure, you probably would," Daniel agreed. "Only—"

"Yes, that's what I'm telling you. This is what's been trying to get through my head for three days, Dan—that it never would work out, and that, as a matter of fact, once I'd sort of got used to Lydia and seen her friends, I wasn't so crazy to see it work out. Get me? What I couldn't think was, how to get out of it nicely and without any fuss. As a matter of fact, I didn't even know that that was what I was trying to think, until I saw 'em coming out of that church, Dan; and then a—sort of a weight rose off me. Funny, ain't it?"

He grinned again. Daniel shrugged his shoulders and gave it up.

"Why, sure, if you look at it that way," he muttered. "Anyhow, you're yourself again—that's all I care about. Well, we'll get back and see what they have to eat at this wedding breakfast, huh?"

James started slightly and rose from his tombstone.

"We'll do what? Not on your life! I want to go on thinking. I need it in my

business. We'll see what's the next train down."

"Go like this, without even hats?" Daniel gasped.

"We can buy hats right over there," said James, as he passed out of the churchyard and made toward his recent friend, the telegraph operator, across the street. "They can send for their truck, and they can pack our bags and ship 'em down after us. They won't kick at that."

"But—"

"Nix!" James said very firmly. "I won't go back there and take a chance on embarrassing Lydia, and maybe making her wonder if she's done the right thing after all. There's no need of my sitting beside Stevens and having her look the two of us over—and maybe start thinking, Danny. Let it go as it is!"

The main line train, according to the operator, left within forty minutes, from

the station at the other end of town. They purchased caps and headed for the other end of town.

"Now, we've still got a week or more to bum," James sighed happily. "I think we'll beat it back to McGlown's."

"Well," Daniel said meditatively, "McGlown's is all right. Good beds there!"

"Yes, and good eats," mused James. "And, another thing, I—I want to get acquainted with that Philips kid, Dan. She looked pretty nice!"

"After the way you treated her?" Mr. Finch gasped.

"Huh? That?" James grinned complacently. "I'll have that all squared in one minute and fifteen seconds by the clock. You just leave that to me!"

Then he smiled—a smile of that complacent, utterly assured self-confidence which is such a rare joy to its fortunate possessor!

THE END

GRANT IT SO

Love's a liar—grant it so;
He's a thief of honor, too,
Fickle in his deepest sighs,
And, if true, oft falsely true.

Tell the worst that you can say,
I will grant you all you will;
Trifler, pander, despot, rogue—
Love shall be my master still!

Though he fill me full of lies,
Sweet the moments of his truth;
We've a long time to grow old,
But so little time for youth!

Harry Kemp

Established 1860

*Divide the small cost
by the extra years
of service.*

**WINDOW SHADE
FABRICS**

Hartshorn

**SHADE
ROLLERS**